CHUMLEY'S POST

STORY OF THE PAWNEE TRAIL

BY

WILLIAM O. STODDARD

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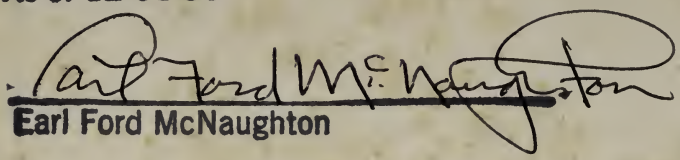

Earl Ford McNaughton

The springing of the trap.

[*Frontispiece*]

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A STORY OF THE PAWNEE TRAIL

By

WILLIAM O. STODDARD

AUTHOR OF "LIFE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN," "CROWDED OUT O' CROFIELD," "WRECKED," "DAB KINZER" SERIES, "THE TALKING LEAVES," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY CHARLES H. STEPHENS

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RED BEAUTY.

A STORY OF THE PAWNEE TRAIL.

CHAPTER I.

IN A NEW COUNTRY.

"That, then, is the northeast corner of my land?"

"I'll swear to it. I never made a more careful survey in all my life. You'd best set a mark there."

"My land lies due west and south?"

"By the compass."

"Exactly. I own a mile square on the surface, but what a fine point it must taper down to at the centre of the earth!"

"Just as well it's thin at that end. I reckon land isn't worth much down where that p'int is."

"They say it's a bad climate, too. Well, Mr. Surveyor, I'll take your advice. I'll only drive a peg now, but I'm going to set up a landmark."

"Good idee. My job's done, Mister. Jim and I've got a long drive before us. Hope you'll have good luck. Set up your landmark; you'll run all your fences right, then."

A light wagon stood near them, with a span of mules in front of it, and the man spoken of as "Jim" was already putting into it the tools of that finished survey. The surveyor himself followed as soon as he had signed a receipt for the money he and Jim had earned, the mules were started upon a sharp trot, and the land-owner was left alone.

He was very much alone, for his "section" of prairie land and forest was in western Nebraska, and there was not a ploughed field or a fence for miles and miles in any direction.

He was a well-made, healthy-looking fellow, with very crisp auburn hair and brown eyes, and somewhat more of beard and moustache than belonged to one-and-twenty. He could not have been older than that, but he had, nevertheless, the peculiar air which surely settles upon a human being who has seen much of the earth and its inhabitants. The intense expression of resolute courage that marked his face added to its "old" look, and he was evidently the right kind of man for a settler in a new country. He would be more so as soon as hard work should improve away the softness of the pair of hands he now thrust into the side-pockets of his cut-away, as he slowly turned upon his heels as

if studying the horizon. There was nothing eastward but rolling prairie, with here and there a clump of trees, but westward, a half-mile or so, the land rose into a range of forest-covered hills. It was as fine a prospect as a reasonable man could ask for, but it did not call any enthusiasm into the sombre face of the new settler. When he had swung himself completely around and was once more looking northward, he fixed his eyes upon a deep-worn rut not many feet from the peg he had driven and remarked,—

"That's the Pawnee Trail, is it? I wonder what makes it more Pawnee than any other kind of Indian, when it's an old buffalo-path, after all? It goes pretty straight, from here to the woods, and it comes pretty near marking the line of my land."

Wheelmarks on either side of the Trail showed that it had been followed by other travellers than red men or wild cattle, but the fresh spring grass was growing in and over these. None would ever grow in the narrow path of the bisons, for their countless feet had beaten it hard as iron. It would some day put unyielding clods before the ploughs that were to come; but at the present time it could be trusted as indicating the very best line of march for any one going through that region.

"No Pawnees for me, if you please," remarked the young settler; "but I suppose they're like other human beings, and you can keep peace with them

if you try. Now for my landmark and some dinner."

He strode rapidly away westward along the trail for some distance, and then turned to the left. He was now upon his own land, and a few minutes of sharp walking brought him in sight of some of his other property.

There was no telling what might be contained in the large, tilted wagon that had been hauled near a fine spring of water, but ploughs and other farming implements were lying around on the grass. Several very good-looking horses were feeding at no great distance, all carefully tethered, but there seemed to be no good reason why a pair of noble-looking mastiffs and a brace of tall stag-hounds should also have been tethered. They were now loudly declaring their pleasure at the coming of their master.

"I'll take them with me this time," he remarked, "and they may do all the hunting they please while I'm chopping."

There was likely to be game enough in that vicinity, but when the young settler took up an axe and walked on towards the forest he made no preparation for sport. He seemed to be deeply, gloomily, absorbingly wrapped up in thoughts which must have been of an unpleasant nature. On the very edge of the woods he stopped and looked at a young hickory, less than a foot in diameter.

"That'll do. I couldn't manage anything heavier very well."

As he said that he drove his axe into the slender trunk with more skill than the color of his hands had seemed to promise, but at that moment the voices of all four of his canine friends rang out together. They had been careering in all directions from the moment in which they were set at liberty, but now they suddenly concentrated their forces. It was as if they had bayed and barked at a mark and ceased as soon as they had hit it. They and their master alike stood still and looked at a curious figure which drew nearer rapidly.

A dingy yellow blanket covered the new arrival, with the exception of his head, legs, and the right arm. That arm came out through a hole in the blanket and carried a rifle. The legs wore deer-skin leggings, on which bits of tattered fringes lingered here and there, but the crown of that wardrobe was a remarkably old and shining silk hat, from under which escaped tangled locks of long gray hair.

"About the ugliest mug I ever saw," remarked the chopper to his nearest dog, as the old Indian came closer.

In another moment the rifle was transferred to the blanket-covered arm, and the dusky right hand was extended with the customary salutation of "How."

"How," said the white man, and then he added, "Do you speak English?"

Perhaps the stranger was asking him if he spoke Choctaw or some similar tongue, for his answer was a string of gutturals such as can be heard only among the red men.

"Not one word except 'how,' eh? I'm afraid I shall learn very little from you, then."

Again the stream of ragged and jagged sounds poured forth liberally, and it was a pity they could not have been understood. There is an idea afloat that American Indians have little or no fun in them, but it is a great mistake.

There stood the gray-haired aborigine, with grim solemnity, applying to the young settler all the bad words he knew, and he evidently knew a large number. Not only the youth himself but all his kindred, of both sexes, were described as animals and reptiles of the most unpleasant varieties and accused of all sorts of misdemeanors.

"Sorry I can't understand you," said the white man. "I did say, when you came up, that you had the ugliest mug I'd ever seen in all my life, but I didn't guess how ghastly a phiz you had till you opened your mouth. I haven't a doubt that you'd murder me for fifty cents."

At least that money's worth of unmitigated blackguardism replied to him from the solemn countenance before him, in the tongue he had

never until that hour listened to, and then the red man sat down upon a fallen tree, as if he meant to watch the chopping of the hickory.

"I'm glad to see that," said the chopper. "Now I needn't go back and watch my horses and things till you're out of sight. If ever a man had a thief's face, you have."

A cheerful smile and a string of hard words replied to him, and he worked away with his axe, not knowing that he had been assured that a squaw could beat him all to pieces in handling that tool. Down came the hickory speedily, however, and a length of about twenty feet of its trunk was trimmed clean of branches.

"I suppose," said the chopper to the Indian, "that it would take a larger tree to do you justice. No doubt whatever but what you ought to be made an acorn of."

Serene was the smile of his hearer, although wonderfully wide, and then the same voice which had managed the gutturals declared in pretty plain English,—

"White boy heap fool."

He may have been, but he was also a man of uncommonly steady nerve, for without a quiver of face or voice he promptly responded,—

"Just so, but I don't often get caught out quite so easily."

"Come chop log. No gun. Pawnee lift hair

for him some day. Hang 'calp in lodge and tell squaw 'fool 'calp.'"

"Are you a Pawnee?"

"Pawnee heap wolf. Good Indian me. Heap good."

"Do you steal much?"

"Good Indian no 'teal. Borrow pony sometime. Take good care of pony when borrow."

"Don't you borrow any of mine, then. Do you see them?"

The dogs had taken no part in the conversation, but they were plainly interested in the old redskin. One mastiff was sitting near enough to be patted on the head, and submitted quietly; but the canine opinion of the stranger was not high, and no tail among them expressed gratification as he stepped from one to another, cultivating their acquaintance.

"Heap good dog," said he, with strong emphasis.

"They'll know you the next time. What name do you go by? What's your tribe?"

"Boy know enough now. Somebody ask him who meet in woods. Boy tell all about him."

"Keep your secret, then. I'm going for a horse to haul this stick."

"Got horse? Good Indian come borrow him some day, when dog all gone. Maybe Pawnee come first. No horse there then. No boy."

"I believe I'll take that warning about going unarmed," said the new settler. "It may not be so safe as the surveyor represented. I shan't be alone while they're putting up the house and stables. Things 'll be safer after that's done."

The Indian walked along at his side in silence until he came to the horses. One was selected, the harness was put upon him with a drag-chain intended for the log, and the young man turned to lead him away, when his queer acquaintance opened his wide mouth again, with,—

"White boy heap fool. Go leave good Indian by horses."

"Never you mind, my friend. You'll have company," said the new settler, quietly; but the red man had not seen or heard his instructions to those dogs.

Their master went for the hickory, but they did not. They all lay down within a few paces of the "good Indian," and looked at him.

"Ugh! Heap trap!" was his only comment, but he deemed it best to sit in a very unoccupied stillness until the owner of those horses should come back. Once, when he partly arose, a mastiff rose also, and something like the beginning of a growl rumbled in the deep chest of one of the hounds. It was best to sit down again, lest they should show further signs of dissatisfaction.

"Ugh! Much dog. Suppose kill one, then get

eat up by three. No good. Boy say horse not borrow this time."

It looked so, and the young settler now returned along the Trail with his hickory stick. When he came within hailing distance he shouted to his dogs and they bounded away, releasing the old Indian from his "heap watch." He at once arose and shouldered his rifle, and when the former came for a spade he was ready to remark,—

"Ugh! Heap dig? Rifle good. No tell when want him."

There was something ominous but not unfriendly in the positive manner of his repeated warning, but when he was asked,—

"Are there any Indians on the war-path nowadays?" he replied,—

"Boy all alone. Got horse. S'pose Pawnee want horse, nobody ever say what boy did. Ran away, maybe. Take what friend say."

It was not a very cheerful saying, but it was taken, and the sombre young face grew yet more cloudy and at the same time more resolute. The hickory pole was rapidly dragged to its destination, and the spade was plied with vigor until a hole was made of sufficient depth to promise firm holding. The butt end of the stick was rolled over the hole and then the old Indian once more said, "Ugh!" This time it was in admiration of the iron strength displayed in the raising of that landmark. It went

up without one pause in the steady lifting; the earth was packed in around it, and the man who had put it there stepped back to look at it.

"Now," he exclaimed, "I know where the corner of my land is. If anybody else comes to inquire they'll have a starting-point. They'll be able to say, 'That's Chumley's Post.'"

"Ugh!" said his companion, but the white man went on:

"Odd thought! What if a fellow could know the history of all the lives that will stop here and look at that post before it rots down? If I am not mistaken, some of them would beat the novelists all hollow."

Very likely. If, for instance, he could have read the memory of the gray-headed red man who was even now repeating, "Chumley,—Post."

CHAPTER II.

OUT OF PRISON.

At the very hour of the forenoon when Chumley's dogs lay down to watch the old Indian, a white man more than a thousand miles away was under even closer confinement. No connection could be imagined between this man and the young pioneer or his landmark. He was one of hundreds who were at that hour variously employed in a vast stone structure on the eastern bank of the Hudson River. He was a convict in Sing Sing prison, but he was not now at any work. He stood erect in his narrow cell, looking at the door.

"At noon to-day," he said. "They will come soon, and my three years of this gehenna are ended."

He was a tall, fine-looking fellow, of twenty-three or four years, and it seemed an awful pity to see him there. His thick, black, glossy hair had been recently permitted to grow a little beyond the "prison crop," and his keen, brilliant eyes were full of intelligence. His forehead was broad, his aquiline nose well shaped, and it was not till his mouth could be studied that an observer could find

much fault with his features. That was not too large, but it was thin-lipped and sharp at the corners. Lines went out from these which partly explained the faint crow's-feet on his temples. It was a face too selfish to serve "self" well, and its present expression changed with flickering rapidity. In all the changes, however, there lingered one black shadow. The one thought burning within him found expression in words as well as in fierce and wrathful darkenings of face. His voice was hoarse and low, and there was gall and wormwood in every syllable.

"Free? That's it. Out into the world again. To be pointed at. CONVICT! Served his term in Sing Sing! No. The frontier is the place for me. I'll get even with this world before I die. Won't I?"

The words had almost a hissing sound, so full were they of hate and bitterness. When a man has so lived and acted that a just judge and jury put him into Sing Sing, his chances for improvement by years of association with felons, iron bars, and stone walls are not very good.

"Name?" he said, again. "I'll take any name but the one I was born with. I'll pick me out one when I disappear. Nobody that knows me will ever see me again."

Just then there came a sound of feet towards the door at which he was staring, and the cold sweat stood upon his forehead.

"They have come!" he said.

Half an hour later he stood in what looked more like a lawyer's office than a room in any prison, but he was not free quite yet. He had put off the striped garb of a convict for a neat, plain suit of black, but he had not yet put off the prison manner, and his bearing was of the sullen respect paid by crime to force while he listened to the customary formalities of liberation. These included excellent words of counsel and exhortation from the prison officials, but even the kindly-faced chaplain failed to elicit from him anything more than disciplined attention.

"Mortimer Herries," said the good man, earnestly, "I pray God you may never again find yourself in such a place as this."

"That is a name, Mr. Smith, by which I shall never again be known, but I suppose you mean me. You may be sure of one thing: I shall never trouble this prison again. If I ever write another man's name for mine, on a check, by any mistake, it will be far enough from this."

"Change your name. Make a new name and keep it clean. Be a new man."

"Made over new in Sing Sing? We will see about that. I thank you all, gentlemen, but I am looking at the clock and cannot talk very well."

Evidently he was a man of education and capacity, and even the hard-headed prison officials

remarked to one another that it must be a terrible thing for him to go out among other men.

"You see," said one, "he doesn't leave behind him anything but the striped jacket. He's as good as branded."

"Well," replied another, "that can't be helped. He should have thought of that when he forged the check. I'm afraid there's all sorts of mischief in him. Look at his eye."

There was nothing pleasant there to look at. He seemed to be making an effort to suppress every indication of feeling, and he succeeded fairly well, so far as all other emotions were concerned, but the sense of his degradation was evidently upon him strongly.

"He needs a little more brass," said the same official to the chaplain, "and it always comes to 'em after they've been out a day or two. He was a man of good family."

"Poor fellow!" said the chaplain; and he was poor enough, but when he was informed that transportation would be given him to the city in which he had been convicted, and by a railway train leaving a few minutes after twelve o'clock, he responded,—

"New York? Yes. I'll go there, but I shall not stay there. I shall have funds provided. This is the last of Mortimer Herries."

There was little more to be said or done. The

turning loose of some convict whose time is out is an every-day affair at Sing Sing. It is only too often accompanied by a shrewd calculation as to how long it will be before the man released will be back again, but all were inclined to take Herries at his word.

"It's a big country," they said. "He has brains enough to go somewhere and do well yet."

"I don't know," was added. "He's likely to be an expensive neighbor. The community he settles in is not to be congratulated."

That was the opinion of a good judge, especially of criminal human nature, and yet the gentleman in black who entered the railway train at Sing Sing was in no respect the inferior, so far as personal appearance went, of any other passenger in the car that carried him. Neither did any man or woman there mistake him for a convict. He looked into every face that from time to time was turned upon him, and not one of all accused him of having put off the prison stripes that day.

It was a day of marked importance to quite a number of people. Towards the close of its business hours a carefully dressed, middle-aged gentleman sat by a table in a down-town mercantile office, with the inquiring look upon his face of a man who is waiting for somebody to come. That and every other meaning conveyed by the clear-cut and somewhat swarthy features testified also to the

fact that he was a polished, finished, utterly self-possessed man of the world. A keen observer might have gathered the idea that he had prepared himself for something, but if so, he had done it wonderfully well. He had taken care to be alone, if care had been needed, and he did not rise from his chair when the door opened, although he bowed to the man who came in. It was Mr. Mortimer Herries, that hour arrived from Sing Sing.

"Walk in, sir. Take a seat."

"Thank you, no. My business is brief enough."

"Certainly. I received your letter. You have mine. I have no questions to ask, Mr. Herries——"

"Payne, if you please. You are mistaken about the name."

"Beg pardon, Mr. Payne. It is better so. There is the money spoken of in my letter. I do not think Mrs. Herries or the young ladies are at home to-day."

"They need not trouble themselves. I had no intention of calling. Am I expected to thank you for the money?"

"Certainly not, if you keep your contract——"

"I shall keep it. Three years in State-prison have taught me some things. You will never see me again or hear of me. And yet I had a father once, —a mother,—sisters,—a brother,—a home."

There were years of shame and agony in the quivering voice with which the words were uttered,

but the hard lips of the man of the world before him parted only to reply,—

"Exactly, and you traded them for a cell in Sing Sing. As a man soweth so shall he reap. Do you now wish to say anything more, Mr. Payne?"

"Not one word, to you or them."

His hands had closed upon a packet of bank-notes which looked like a liberal provision for his proposed journeying. He stuffed it quickly into an inner pocket of his coat, put on his hat, turned away without offering or receiving a grasp of the hand in farewell, and walked slowly out of the office. The door closed, and then the gray head of the man of the world and of business was bowed for a moment upon the table before him. Father and son had been parted forever by something many degrees more terrible than mere death, and human nature claimed its own with a great pang.

The man who went out seemed to have recovered his equilibrium suddenly. Before he had turned the first corner he remarked to himself,—

"I can get my baggage together, now I've got the money, in time to take the evening train for the West. Mr. Payne, Mr. Edward Payne, if you please, is going to Chicago."

How much farther and for what purpose in life he did not say, but he at once set about making purchases of clothing and other matters, sufficient to pack a travelling-satchel, purchased first. He

was yet busy with his preparations at the hour of one scene more in which he might have taken an interest if he had been present.

The elder Mr. Herries, man of the world and of business, had reached his elegant home and had gone at once to his own room. He was waited for. A tall, aristocratic-looking lady came forward to meet him. Her face was very pale, and her eyes were red as if with weeping.

"Husband," she said, "did you see Mortimer? Did he come?"

"No, my dear. There is no such person any more. A Mr. Payne, from Sing Sing, called at the office. I understand that he leaves town at once, but I did not ask in what direction."

"Did he say anything? Did he send any message?"

"Not a word, except that we should never see him again or hear of him. He is gone!"

"Husband, it is awful! I know you have seen him, but it seems to me that he died three years ago. Oh, how I wish I could have seen him once more!"

"It is better as it is, every way, Mary. Let us say no more, just now."

She was a woman of the world, but for all that she was a mother, and she, too, covered her face and bowed her head, for she had lost a son.

CHAPTER III.

VERY DIFFERENT PEOPLE.

Sing Sing prison is a long distance from Chumley's Post, and so are many other spots upon the earth's broad surface. One of those other spots, even more distant, was elegantly furnished. It had a well-set table in the middle of it, not for dinner but for "luncheon," and near one end of this a lady and a gentleman were standing at the very time when the old Indian said "Ugh!" at seeing the pole lifted so easily.

The gentleman was a broad-shouldered youth of perhaps five-and-twenty, with very blond hair and side-whiskers, while the lady was a very pretty brunette, evidently at least three years younger, whom he had twice already spoken to as "darling."

"Your mother will be down in a minute," she said. "She has a letter from Dick this morning."

"Glad of it. Where is he now?"

"North America, somewhere. I can't quite make it out. He does not speak of you or me."

"He'll recover his senses one of these days. Meantime, travel will be good for him."

"Chelmsford, love, it was no fault of mine——"

"We are all agreed on that point. Even his mother says he has only himself to blame. Don't speak of it, darling."

"Seems to me I was not even giddy. But he talks of land and settling and remaining."

"Good sign. Mind recovering its tone. Been awfully seasick several times. Nothing like it. I must see the letter, though. Come, darling. That's mother's voice. I'm wolfishly hungry."

He looked lovingly at his "darling" while eating, and he ate well, and the portly lady at the head of the table talked freely about Dick and his doings, but she was the only member of the trio who went so far as to say,—

"How I would like to see him! Think of it! he has been around the world since——"

"Now, mother," interrupted the blond young gentleman, "you've made Laura blush again. Let's try another subject."

So they did, successfully, and Dick, whoever he might be, was permitted to drop out.

It was a good time for lunch, even if one chose to call it dinner. Elegance and refinement in one place, rude simplicity in another, but high noon all the same, and the queer old Indian at Chumley's Post again said "Ugh!" with strong emphasis, when his white acquaintance asked him to come along and have something to eat. He still avoided

giving any information about himself. His name and tribe were to be for the present a kind of secret, and he was allowed to keep it without any prying on the part of Chumley.

"I wish I had a good photograph of him, hat and all," he said, "and he would smile just as handsomely without any name. No, I won't quote Shakespeare. He isn't like any rose I ever saw."

Nevertheless, while the fire was kindling and other preparations were making, there were many quiet questionings on the part of Chumley as to the state of mind prevailing among the red men of the Nebraska border, and this their elderly brother appeared to have a very poor opinion of them, taken as a whole. They were but black sheep, with an especially deep coloring for the iniquities of the Pawnees, and it would be well for any lonely white man to keep his dogs awake, his horses well tethered, and his fire-arms in good condition.

"'Calp him some day, anyhow," was cheerfully predicted. "Keep eye out and make Pawnee wait a little 'fore lift hair."

"That's nice. I believe I'll do it. Coffee's ready. Now I know where my land really is, I'm going to put my tent up after dinner."

Rashers of bacon, with army bread, helped out the coffee, but it was manifest that for some unknown reason the old Indian was getting uneasy. His snaky eyes were continually glancing in all

directions. He ate rapidly, and had appeased his hunger before his host was half done.

"What's your hurry?" asked Chumley, as the Indian arose and took up his rifle. "Stay and have a smoke. Is there anybody after you?"

"Ugh! Maybe. Boy good friend now. Look! Look *me!* Ugh?"

"I see you. Well?"

"Heap lie. Never saw. Don't know. Not been here."

"All right. I don't know you. Go along. If any of your friends come to ask after you I'll say it was some other Indian."

"Good-by. Keep eye out and take rifle every time. Keep hair."

"Good luck to you."

The old man turned on his moccasins and walked rapidly away eastward.

"Gone to hide himself on the prairie, has he? Well, I'll take his advice and have a rifle within reach. Have I got to carry a revolver, too? I'm afraid so. Now for the tent, and the sooner those fellows come and put up a log house for me the better I'll be satisfied."

Chumley was busy with his dishes and things while he spoke, and his next exclamation was a loud one.

"The old thief! All the cold boiled ham and a good pound of hard-tack. Is anything else gone?

He's a skilled workman. The hook-nosed old owl! At all events he'll be sure of a good supper. I'll try for a deer in the morning, or some prairie-chickens, I don't much care which, but I mustn't use up all my pork."

The tent which he now pulled out of his wagon and proceeded to put up was of the regular army pattern, and promised more comfortable "quarters" than the tilted wagon. There was a good camp-bed to put into it, and a stool, but no luxuries were yet visible. When all was completed, the new settler lighted a pipe and seated himself in the door of his tent, saying to one of his hounds,—

"Pawnees are coming, old fellow. How'd you like that? I wonder how it would seem to actually point a gun at a man, red or white, and pull the trigger? I may have it to do before long, according to that marvellously ugly old thief that stole my ham."

It was a lazy manner of spending the remaining hours of that very beautiful spring day, but there seemed hardly any other way for employing the time. There was the land, all around, the best in the world, but there was no farm there yet. There was the spring, but with no house by it, and at last Chumley aroused himself sufficiently to go and take a look at that matter.

"I'll tell you what we will do," said he to his dogs. "We will have our house built all around

that spring, and then we can have a drink at any hour of the day or night, Pawnees or no Pawnees. A good log house is a kind of fort, anyhow, and we'll make our house safe to live in. What do you say?"

Only one of the hounds seemed to consider a reply needful, and he, not knowing what other remark to make, put up his head and indulged himself in a short howl.

"That," said Chumley, "must be on account of the ham. I shall have a lonely evening of it, but for the first time in my life I shall sleep, to-night, upon my own land. The trees over the tent are mine. So is the spring. So is the grass. I think I'll put in a claim on some deer and grouse in the morning."

He had reached a journey's end in safety. He and his team and wagon were a type and sample of thousands that were plodding the new paths of the West that day. One more of these, although he knew it not, was pushing forward along the Pawnee Trail towards the stick of hickory that marked the corner of Chumley's land.

CHAPTER IV.

A DOUBLE TRAP.

THERE was a very good basis for Chumley's idea that the old Indian believed himself followed by somebody. At the same time it occurred to him that his queer guest was likely to be a difficult snake to catch. The man who is himself a good trailer is likely to know how to keep out of the reach of other men.

Where the supposed fugitive slept that night nobody could have told but himself. Possibly he did not do any great length of sleeping. At all events the rising sun of the next morning found him prowling in the vicinity of the Pawnee Trail.

He paid a visit of curiosity, as it seemed, to Chumley's Post, but, for some reason unexpressed, he approached it very much as if he were somewhat afraid of it. He looked at the hickory stick itself with a suppressed grunt, and then he looked at all the grass near it, from tuft to tuft. At its base there was, of course, much loose earth scattered, and upon this were many prints of Chumley's boots.

What could there be of special interest in those footmarks, that made them worth so careful a study?

The stooping investigation ended with a short, sharp yell, and this was followed by,—

"Five Pawnee. All fool. All step out of trail to come leave track at Chumley Post."

It was a matter of course that any Indian coming along that Trail should leave its beaten security to examine so new and seemingly so useless an "improvement" as the landmark. It was a thing to be handled, inquired into, and discussed. So were the wheelmarks of the surveyor's wagon, and the boot-tracks made by Chumley and by the surveyor and his man Jim. It had been decided that three white men and one Indian had been at work, but not an idea could be had beyond that from the signs recorded on the Post or the earth around it. So five other pairs of feet had left proofs of their presence and returned to the hard-baked, remarkable Trail.

The old man now studying those footprints did not know that their makers had carried with them one more evidence of the near neighborhood of white men. Neither did Chumley know why his dogs had awakened him in the dusk before the dawn that morning. They had bayed and barked sonorously, and he had vainly asked of them to explain themselves.

"Is it a wolf, boys?" he demanded, three times. "Or is somebody coming? What is the row?"

He was not to know, right away, but each of them in turn had sent out to listening ears among the shadows the assurance that he was a white man's dog, and of an uncommonly large size.

The listeners heard and grunted, but had no present errand which carried them any nearer to a camp so well guarded. The errand they did have led them on into the prairie. The one thing which had puzzled them among the "signs" near the foot of the "Post" had been the traces of moccasined feet, every peculiarity of which was strange to them.

"Heap big brave," they said, and Chumley had noticed that his visitor of the day before wore moccasins which seemed much too large for him. If these Pawnees were aware of the size of his feet they may have received false tidings by way of those tracks in the dirt, and he may have intended that they should. At all events he now turned away with a satisfied air, remarking,—

"Ugh! Pawnee heap go blind. Walk right by. Wait see 'em go back. Then all safe."

He had not missed in his estimate of the number of the squad of red men whose possible pursuit he was dodging so cunningly, but he could hardly have been aware of what might almost be termed their financial condition. In all the prose and poetry devoted to Indian affairs, the red warrior

is invariably depicted fully armed. He is also mounted upon at least one pony, and is otherwise provided for the exigencies of frontier romance and reality. Such is apt to be the case, truly, but savage life has its vicissitudes and its vices. Among the most inveterate of the latter is gambling. It is more likely to set a warrior on foot, empty-handed, than is even a collision with the United States cavalry. In the fever of excitement over games of chance go all possessions,—weapons, horses, blankets, and among some tribes even squaws and children may be staked and lost.

Whether or not the man they were following had anything to do with their evil fortunes, here were five Pawnees who had but one rifle among them and no ammunition. All had knives, and two carried clubs, and the absence of blankets was no great matter at that season of the year. They wore instead, so to speak, cloudy and dejected faces, full of utter desperation. They were far away from their proper "reservation," and the annual day for presents from their "great father at Washington," and for annuities, was long months ahead of them. They were in precisely the state of mind and pocket—although they had no pockets and but narrow minds—in which a born horse-thief and scalp-taker is most dangerous.

They were under the necessity of making a strike upon the possessions of some other man or men,

and they were now scouting along the Trail for that purpose quite as much as for vengeance of any sort. They were a full mile beyond the Post when the fact of their passage became known to the old Indian standing by it. He seemed to derive an intense degree of satisfaction from the results of his investigation. It was as if he had set a trap and had caught something important. He walked away but a few steps before he took from under his blanket an old haversack, and out of that the remains of a boiled ham, holding it by the bone while he cut off for himself a slice large enough to reward him for discovering the arrival and departure of his enemies. He ate slowly, and he did not know that they had been instrumental in stirring up Chumley to a very early breakfast. The edge of the knife had once more reached the ham-bone when the carver was startled into the utterance of a surprised grunt. The sound of a horse's feet was very near him, and the haversack was hardly under the blanket in safety before a loud, cheery voice hailed him with,—

"Hullo! You here yet?"

"How. Good Indian watch for Pawnee. Pawnee come!"

"What did you do with my ham?"

"Ugh! No 'teal him. Heap eat. Ham good. No talk ham. Say Pawnee come! Boy keep eye out!"

There was enough in the manner of his utterance to arouse some small interest, but it deepened fast when he beckoned Chumley towards the Post and tried to explain to him the meaning of the several faint impressions in the dirt.

"That's what was the matter with my dogs this morning. I guess I won't let my hunting carry me far away."

"Watch horse,—better. Boy fool about deer. Not know how. Old man tell him. Get plenty then."

"What do you mean?"

A great deal of first-class pantomime helped the red man to give full payment for the ham and the hard-tack, in the shape of a lecture on the easiest method for getting deer-meat for dinner. Not on horseback in broad daylight, while the deer were feeding and watching, but before dawn and armed with a double-barrelled gun. Not then riding around upon the great pasture aimlessly, but following the tall grass in the bed of some dried or half-dried "slough." Here would the deer lie overnight, and here could they be shot or pulled down in the morning.

"Boy know heap now," was the hopeful finish. "Old Indian come again. Boy boil ham for him 'nother time. Bye!"

"Come along," said Chumley. "If you won't do anything worse than that you may come as often

as you choose. I'll ride around awhile, though. May strike something."

That he might possibly do so was freely acknowledged by a nod of the head, and he turned his horse's nose northward, while his instructor in prairie methods walked off in the opposite direction.

"If they've really gone by," said Chumley to himself, "my traps will be safe enough till noon, anyhow. But wasn't he cool enough about the ham?"

He certainly had been, and he was now considering a probability which had not occurred to the deer-hunter. The five dismounted Pawnees were the last men in the world to do any more walking than their needs called for. Neither would they run any especial or undue personal risks. By that Trail or some other they would soon be retracing their steps, whether successful or not. The old Indian therefore declared himself in need of nothing but a hiding-place for the present. He speedily found one, and he also found a greater need for it than he had at all counted on. Less than an eighth of a mile southeasterly from the Post set up by the young settler, a score or so of oaks and hickories indicated the presence of water. It was a widely-scattered clump of trees, and the spring was small and somewhat marshy, but this had encouraged the luxuriant growth of bushes. Willow and hazel and sumach combined with blackberry and wild

rose to produce masses of tangled leaf and flower and thorn, through which the deer and buffalo had kept abundant pathways perennially open. The old Indian found something more like a rabbit-path at one point, and it enabled him to almost burrow his way to within a dozen paces of the spring. It was a place of much comfort for an elderly man with nothing to do, but a strong reason had been given him for going there suddenly. His walk from the Post had taken him to the clump of trees, and he was almost half-way through them when something seemed to knock him down, so suddenly did he drop into the grass.

Nothing but the sound of human voices had hit him, but they came from a squad of men who were entering the grove upon the opposite side. Indian ears could decide that the sounds came from Indian tongues. It was probably too late to run away, and so a bolder and more profitable mode of escape was taken, although it brought the old Indian within a few paces of four of the very Pawnees he seemed to be escaping from. It was within hearing distance, and he speedily learned why there were four instead of five. He learned also various particulars of their views of his own life and character, and the value of his scalp to him in case they should meet him alone, upon the prairie or elsewhere.

Still as a log, keenly catching every sound and

watching every motion, the lurking fugitive lay and waited for the working out of what seemed to be a plot of more than ordinary cunning. He had already heard enough to know that all that matter hung upon the coming of the fifth Pawnee, who was as a sort of chief and leader to this quartette, and in whom they confided greatly.

There had not been any trouble with the Indians, of any tribe along that frontier, for so long a time that the government agents were quite justified in assuring emigrants of its safety. Trains large and small came and went unmolested, and there was no fear whatever accompanying the slow movements of one modest outfit that morning. It was lumbering along the Pawnee Trail, westward. One tilted wagon, drawn by four good mules, seemed to be well packed with household goods, and a saddled horse was haltered to the rear of the wagon, but the really valuable part of the whole affair walked side by side near the heads of the foremost span of mules.

Three persons, every one of them as bright and smiling as the spring morning on the prairie. A tall, broad-shouldered, yellow-bearded man, a perfect type of the old Norsemen, the sea-kings, or of such sons of the Vikings as Charles the Twelfth of Sweden gathered for his famous "Yellow Regiment." On his right walked a woman, whose erect, vigorous form, rosy face, and kindly blue eyes be-

longed to the same splendid type of humanity. On his left there tripped along a golden-tressed fairy of the North, who had inherited from both father and mother and from her ancient race their characteristic beauty. The girl may have been thirteen, but was yet completely a child, and was now glancing around her with all a child's delight at the new world they were entering.

There was something of Swedish quaintness in the dress of all three, although it was of good material and indicated no poverty. Mother and daughter wore their uncovered hair in skilfully plaited braids which were all their own. Not one word of English mingled with their remarks upon what they saw, but no interpreter was needed when the fair girl pointed forward along the path they were following. The words she uttered so musically meant,—

"There's a man coming, father."

She should have said, "A Pawnee," for there were some drawbacks to the manhood of the being who was now approaching.

Objects can be seen at long distances upon the prairie, "from rise to rise." The Pawnees had been watching on the crest of one high roll of the plain when the white tilt of the wagon loomed upon another, four miles away. They watched until they could say, "Ugh! One wagon," and decide that it must be investigated. If it could

be lured away from the direct line of the Trail and plundered in peace and security, so much the better, but it brought the hope of a probable new start in life to five broken-down, ponyless Pawnee gamblers, and it was very welcome.

"Indian, Erica," was all the reply made by her father.

When they reached the spot where the dusky wayfarer stood, seeming to be waiting for them, two strangely opposite human developments were face to face and holding out right hands of greeting.

The contrast was tremendous between the dark, squalid, fierce-featured brutality of the Pawnee vagabond and the sunny, open-faced, large-hearted manhood of the brawny Norseman. Almost too frankly unsuspecting was the greeting given by the Swedes, but the quick eyes of the savage caught the shiver of dislike with which Erica shrank behind her mother.

Communication of ideas was somewhat difficult, but questions and answers were helped out by signs, until the Pawnee made out that this white man was near the end of his journey and meant to go into camp as soon as he should come to trees and water. There were groves in sight, and these could not be meant. It must be the "timber," now no great distance westward.

The mules were pushed a little as one glimpse after another was obtained of the hills and the

forest. The Swede turned to his wife and pointed with his left hand along the Trail, and the words he uttered called a flush of pleasure to her face. They could have been translated,—

"Our farm lies in there somewhere. We can find it by that man's landmark. The surveyor said he intended to put one up."

"Our farm," and Erica repeated the words of that pleasant information after her mother. She would say them in English some day, and they were full of ideas of plenty and peace.

"Our farm,"—if nothing should prevent, for now their Pawnee fellow-traveller pointed in the same direction, making motions as if drinking, and beckoning them to follow him. He would guide them to water and trees and a good place to camp in, and he proceeded to do so.

During all that time Chumley had searched the prairie in vain for deer. Even prairie-chickens seemed to have vanished, and he turned homeward with an idea that he might do better in the woods that afternoon, and that, at all events, he wished to see if his camp were unmolested.

Under the thick cover of the bushes by the spring the nameless old Indian still lay motionless and silent, listening to every word and watching every movement of the wretched quartette who lounged in the open space beyond him. It was plainly an accustomed resting-place, for trees had been felled

and lay rotting, and there were traces of campfires.

Every now and then one of the Pawnees would go out and return as if awaiting a delayed arrival, but a heavy wagon travels slowly through grass and weeds, and it was late in the forenoon before the last scout sent came back with an exclamation which brought the others to their feet. In a moment more all four were hidden among the trees, and when their confederate marched in, followed by the Swedes and their wagon, the camping-ground seemed unoccupied and ready for them. It was a lovely spot, and could easily be made more so, and three pairs of blue eyes kindled with pleasure as the suggestion passed from lip to lip that it must be upon "our farm."

The mules were unharnessed and the horse was unsaddled, and it did not occur to their owners how strong a temptation those animals presented to the dismounted thieves who were eying them from the surrounding cover.

Erica's mother had frequently addressed her husband as "Gustav" while they were on the way. She now uttered the name with startled suddenness, for a second Pawnee came slouching forward, she knew not whence, towards the spot where she was kindling a fire.

They had been successfully lured into the Pawnee trap, and it was ready to be sprung upon them

CHAPTER V.

WIPED OUT ENTIRELY.

THE intended victims of the Pawnees were utterly unsuspicious of lurking danger, up to the moment when the "trap" was suddenly revealed all around them.

Erica had wandered a little from the spring, gazing about her in eager curiosity, and her father was leaning into the wagon after an axe. The Indian who had been their guide suddenly drew his knife and sprang towards Gustav, uttering, as he did so, a piercing war-whoop. Erica's mother arose with a loud shriek, for the second Pawnee was rushing upon her, knife in hand, while her swift glance told her that yet another evil shape had suddenly appeared and was wolfishly darting towards her daughter. Two more were just behind him, and it seemed as if the trap for the destruction of that family had been perfectly set and successfully sprung. Five men can easily murder one, if they take him by surprise, and a woman and a child can do nothing.

It was a terrible moment. So swift a change from peace and security to utter horror.

Then came another change that was every way as swift and terrible. Erica's mother was a strongly-made woman. She seized her assailant by both wrists and struggled with desperate strength for a second of time which seemed an age. Then a gray look shot across his face and a shudder went all through him as he wilted out of her grasp and rolled convulsively upon the grass. She hardly heard or understood the rifle-crack which preceded that shudder. Her eyes were seeking for her husband and for Erica.

Gustav had turned quickly at the war-whoop, and had warded well, but the knife of the Pawnee had gone through his left arm near the shoulder and the grapple was too close for him to use his axe. He was a doomed man unless help should come, for another dusky stabber was almost upon him, with a fiendish yell.

Erica had had a fleeting terror-struck vision of a griping left hand reached out to seize the golden braids of her hair and of a right hand lifting glittering steel. Then she saw a dog's white teeth closing fiercely upon the wrist behind the knife, while a savage whoop changed suddenly into a choking gurgle.

Her father at that moment saw the Pawnee beyond his first assailant spring into the air and fall prostrate. The false guide with whom he was grappling quivered and staggered, dropped his

knife, and went down with a despairing whoop of agony.

The grove was ringing with swift shots, and they were all aware of a man on horseback with a repeating rifle in his hands. Erica's mother afterwards recalled a thought she had that he must have fallen from heaven. It was not so, however, either as to him or the two angry stag-hounds who were now pinning down Erica's assailant. Chumley had ridden towards that grove as his last morning chance for deer, and the first war-whoop had told him what to do. The dogs knew without any telling when they saw him spur so madly forward.

The Pawnees had been trapped and surprised, and every wolf of them was down. Chumley knew why as to three of them, but he was wondering who had fired the shot which had liberated Erica's mother.

It was a puzzle for only a moment. A form he knew came gliding out of some willows near him, with a whoop as savage as that of the Pawnee leader. No hat was now upon the streaming gray hair, as the old Indian bounded towards the Pawnee the dogs were holding. There was no time to check him had anybody thought of doing so, and in an instant more the death-yell of that Pawnee chilled the very hearts of the pale-faces, male and female.

Chumley's face showed that even he was startled,

as he looked upon the transformation undergone by his recent guest.

"He's not the same being!" he exclaimed. "Who would have thought that it was in him!"

Not anybody, perhaps, for all the listless, worn-out old vagabond had disappeared, and a lithe, vigorous, panther-like barbarian, with flashing eyes,—his hideous face more hideous than ever in its all but demoniac expression,—was on the war-path against his personal and hereditary enemies with all his wild blood "up."

Erica and her mother screamed with horror, for they saw two scalps taken, while Chumley was briefly examining the three who had fallen by his own hand. They were all dead, but he had no time for any emotion over that fact. A small, white hand was on his arm, and a pleading voice, half choked with grief, addressed him in a tongue he did not understand.

The streaming eyes of Erica and her pointing finger supplied a translation. Her mother was kneeling beside Gustav, trying to stanch the blood that was pouring from his arm and forehead.

"My soul! I did not know he was hurt. It has all gone by like lightning."

So it had, and all the peril was over, as Chumley at once discovered.

"It's a pity you can't understand me," he said. "The club did his head no real damage. It's only

a flesh wound in the arm. No artery severed. He will bleed freely before we can stop it, but he's in no danger. I don't believe he is hurt anywhere else."

Motions, signs, smiles, dumb encouragement, of every sort he could invent, accompanied the words, and at last both Erica and her mother believed the assurance Gustav gave them when he recovered his consciousness. It was a grand thing and full of new hope, to see him smile again. His wife had his head in her lap, but both she and Erica found themselves under a fresh embarrassment. They had no words at their command wherewith to express their overflowing gratitude to their daring deliverer. He was a hero, a marvel of unselfish courage and prowess. He had not hesitated to charge in, single-handed, against unknown odds, to rescue utter strangers. Their hearts were overflowing, but they had to give it up. Erica held out both hands to him. There were tears in her eyes, but there was a smile of thanks all over her pale, frightened face, and he knew what it meant. He was in a very much disturbed state of mind himself, and yet another surprise was waiting for him. Gustav was fumbling in his breast-pocket with the hand he could use. He now took out and held up a crumpled envelope, and the young settler took it. The address was plainly written "Mr. Chimbly," but it had reached the right man,

for it was from his acquaintance the surveyor. It informed him that Gustav Eagleson's "quarter section" of prairie cornered with his own at the spot where he had said he would put up his landmark. Their lines would run together for half a mile southerly. They were to be near neighbors, and the Swedish immigrants had intended to reach "Chumley's Post" that afternoon. They were to do so, although under different circumstances from any they had imagined.

They were informed, with great heartiness of manner, that they had already found their neighbor, and Erica believed him the bravest, handsomest, most wonderful of human heroes. She had in her mind a very vivid picture of how Chumley looked on horseback, shooting down the Pawnee grappling with her father.

The letter had made its appearance as soon as the condition of Gustav Eagleson permitted. The thoughts of all had been concentrated during those swift minutes, but Chumley now turned and looked around him for the unknown old Indian whose presence and conduct had been so timely and yet so complete a mystery.

"I owe him something now," he remarked. "He may come to my place and steal ham,—anything but horses. Well! I say, now. Where has the old fellow gone?"

Gustav and his wife and Erica were all asking

the same question, but there was no one in that grove capable of giving them an answer.

Chumley imagined one, and it came to him with a keen and strong suggestion that he himself needed to exercise especial prudence. Pawnees had been killed and the old Indian had helped kill them. If he had any feud with these in particular it was wiped out, and he did not wish to bring upon himself the blood-revenge of a whole tribe by letting the facts be known. He had taken two scalps for which he preferred not to render any account. At all events he had disappeared. Chumley searched the grove in vain. He was only a mere white man, after all, and very new to the ways and wiles of the red men. The cunning old object of his search had but gone back to the place where his "rabbit run" went into the tangled mass of the bushes, and he was now lying upon the very spot from which he had fired at the Pawnee whom Mrs. Eagleson was then holding at arm's length.

"I must see to this matter," said Chumley to himself. "Not one trace of the fight must be left, and I must try and make the Swedes understand that the secret of it must be closely kept. There is no end of danger in it."

His next thought was that the sooner he could get his new neighbors away from that place the better. They were trying now to avoid as much as possible the sight of the ghastly relics of the

Pawnee "trap." Nothing like this had been pictured to their minds when they left their far-off northern home to cross the sea. The shock had been severe accordingly, and both mother and daughter were shuddering with dread of other and yet unknown horrors when their new friend came back from his fruitless search. He proceeded at once to harness the mules again, and it was easy to explain that they were all to go to his own place.

The stunning effect of the club blow upon Gustav's forehead had nearly passed away. He was weak from loss of blood, but was able to help himself a little when Chumley was ready to put him into the wagon. A great gloom seemed to pass away from all of them as soon as they were out of the grove, and the mules were not halted until the Pawnee Trail was reached at the Post.

Gustav Eagleson, on the mattress in the wagon, was aided to lift his head and look back from that point over land that was all his own. His face brightened cheerfully, but the shadow deepened upon that of his wife. It was all very green and beautiful. No doubt but what it was richly fertile. She had dreamed for many a long day of a home on such a piece of earth's surface, but now it was reached there was blood upon it. Peril and violence had been her welcome. Even if she had heard or read the story of the American frontier,—one long, ragged line of conflict, drifting westward,—it had

never been made real to her. Now she was a part of it, and one terrible episode of its bloody annals belonged to her and hers.

It was easy for Chumley to get a smile from Erica, and then he stirred up the team for another carefully-driven pull. The next halt was before his own tent.

It was while trying to make the Eaglesons understand that they were to occupy the tent as their own for the present, that Chumley broke out into a sudden address to himself.

"Look here, old fellow, you've got to turn schoolmaster. They've all three got to learn English." And then he turned to Erica, pointing at the canvas shelter and saying, sharply,—

"Tent!"

"Tent," she exclaimed, with a quick comprehension of his purposes, and she followed him with repetitions of the names he gave her of a dozen other articles in quick succession.

"School's begun," said Chumley. "I'll get Gustav into the tent, and then we must have some dinner. It'll be a great blessing to me if his wife knows how to cook. It's all a most extraordinary affair."

There was no great difficulty in helping Gustav out of the wagon and into the tent, with Chumley on one side and Mrs. Eagleson on the other. There was little wonder that she had been able to hold the

hands of an undersized red-skin, for her round, fair arm had in it the inherited strength of her race.

"He will be out in a few days," said Chumley. "He is a handsome fellow and so is his wife, but Erica is wonderful. She can't possibly keep all that beauty when she's a grown-up woman."

CHAPTER VI.

A HICKORY TOMBSTONE.

Mr. Edward Payne, recently Mr. Mortimer Herries and that day from Sing Sing, made his purchases with rapidity, for the through express train which left New York at seven o'clock P.M. bore him westward. He had taken passage in a parlor-car for Chicago, saying to himself,—

"By the time I get there I shall know what to do next. Things look differently, now the old flint has been so liberal with his supplies. On the whole I'm glad he didn't ask me to the house. I've had humiliation enough and nonsense enough."

Of that which depraves and hardens he had clearly had enough, and every word he uttered justified his father in being an "old flint," if indeed he had been. Sons have duties to their fathers

as well as fathers to their sons. Even the most loving mother cannot change the fact that the way of the transgressor is hard. The man who brings disgrace upon his brothers and sisters cannot blame them if they shrink from a sure promise of more.

"Edward Payne," he said. "I must get used to it, but I may need more than one. I know a pile of things I did not know when I went to the striped-jacket college at Sing Sing. I don't think burglary or any other kind of civilized work would do for me. No, not counterfeiting. It takes too much capital and requires peculiar training. I've had one lesson on forgery. If I should try to set up in any regular business they'd manage to trace my record somehow, sooner or later. I'm for the borders. I want to go where they shoot a man for asking foolish questions. Then I'd like to shoot some men I could name."

The swift train bore him on through the darkness. It was a long train and full, but it was empty compared to the busy brain of its ex-convict passenger in the splendid palace-car.

He had memories to throng one another and bring hot flushes to his face and fierce words to his lips, and his black eyes glittered at times with angry light. He was trying to drive away the past, however, for he had left one life behind him and was riding at railway speed into another. He

was dreaming evil dreams, wide awake, as to what that life was to be.

Other young men, by the hundred, were at that season of the year preparing to graduate from colleges and universities, and were filling their ambitious young hearts and heads with visions of usefulness and honor. This young man had just been graduated from State-prison, and was choosing for himself a life of what he was fool enough to call "adventure." He would see wild life, excitement, lawless freedom, an utterly selfish search for he knew not what of unfettered indulgence.

"Plans?" he exclaimed, at last. "I'll go without any plans and take my chances. I'll rough it. I'll change my name every other day, so that no man can trace me, and I'd as lief be a Sioux war-chief as anything else."

Little he knew about Indians and their war-chiefs, but there is a vast amount of insanity among evil-doers. The railway train could be trusted to carry him as far as Chicago, but there was no telling what his heart and brain would do with him afterwards. It was while the train was doing its best the following day, that the Pawnees by the spring received the last rewards of their own devotion to "wild life."

Tremendous as had been to them the excitement of that forenoon, its terrible events had consumed less time than the actors therein might have im-

agined. Chumley's watch told him that it was barely twelve o'clock when he beckoned Mrs. Eagleson out of the tent, where she was watching by her wounded husband, led her to a fire he had kindled, and with many expressive signs placed his coffee-pot, frying-pan, dishes, bacon, and hard-tack at her disposal. It was not much of a kitchen, but she was to be queen of it. Erica came also, as soon as she saw her mother at work, and with her came the two stag-hounds. From the moment in which they had pulled down the Pawnee, they had seemed to consider themselves peculiarly entitled to cultivate her acquaintance. They had not been jealous when she petted and praised the tawny mastiffs, but these had each in turn lain down again, while the hounds continued their attendance. Chumley had taught her their names, but now he was compelled to interfere and send them about their business that their new mistress might play assistant cook.

"I'll try and get something better than bacon to-morrow," he said, "but my hands will be full this afternoon."

Mrs. Eagleson smiled as if she understood him. Then the shadow returned, for it was not easy to be cheerful with such a morning behind her. There might be other Indians coming. There were the woods yonder, and she could not help imagining perils hidden among them, ready to burst forth. She

was glad to find that Gustav could eat. There was encouragement in that, but she trembled, after dinner, when Chumley took his double-barrelled gun, mounted a horse, and rode away, leading another horse. A shovel that he also carried gave her the only hint she had of his errand, and that suggestion brought with it shudder after shudder.

"I don't know how good a sexton I am," said Chumley, as he drew near his landmark, "but I won't make my cemetery near the spring. That grove is their best place to build in, and I mustn't spoil it for them. Right here by the Post is a better place. I'll dig a hole six feet by six."

Soft as was the black earth of the prairie, that meant a deal of vigorous digging, and the blue clay he struck when four feet down from the surface made the task yet harder. He had cut the sods with unexplained care, and had laid them all in a heap by themselves.

Dig, dig, dig, and time went steadily by, but at last he threw his shovel out upon the grass and sprang up after it, exclaiming,—

"There. That'll have to do. I hardly thought until this minute how awful the rest of it would be. Why, it's horrible!"

He did not pause to think of it, but mounted his horse and led the other towards the grove. He was to have something more to think of after he reached it and sprang from his saddle to the ground.

There they lay, the five slain Pawnee vagabonds, where he had left them, but there had been a hand there while he was away.

All had lost their scalps now. The rifle carried by one of them had before been left beside his body, but it was gone now. So was every knife.

"That old Indian's been here," said Chumley. "I seem to have made a friend of him somehow. Glad of it. He has done all that belonged to him. Now for my part."

Once more the uncommon strength of his spare, sinewy frame was exhibited in the ease with which he could lift a lifeless Pawnee, place him upon a blanketed horse, and take him away.

Trip after trip was made, until the grove was cleared of its grisly occupants. Then came another long, weary pull of shovelling, and in spite of all his toughness, Chumley sat down upon an ant-hill exhausted, after fitting into place the last square of sod. He had trodden and packed the earth as he shovelled it in, and all that was left over was heaped at the foot of the Post.

"An army might march by," he said, "and never dream of what's under that sod. In one week's time the best trailer among all their kith and kin might search the grove and all this neighborhood and not find a sign to help him guess what's become of them."

Less time than that would really be required.

A smart shower of rain that fell that very night did all that could be asked for. When the next morning came there were no stains upon the grass and leaves under the trees near the spring, and the neatly-fitted sods at the Post were as fresh and green as if no human hand had disturbed them. No suspicion was likely to search six feet below, but the very unlikeliest of all things will come to pass.

The sun was sinking low when Chumley finished his dreary duty. He now arose from the ant-hill and turned towards his horses.

"I'm so tired I hardly care to mount," he said, but for all that he got into the saddle. Then he turned and looked down and added, aloud, "It's a curious thought, but it comes to me over and over. If it had not been for a woman's heartless folly I should not be here. If I had not been here those five would not be there. I don't like to think of what would have been the fate of the Eaglesons. There have been immigrant families to whom such devils incarnate came at an hour when there was no help. It's altogether too deep for me, and I give it up."

He did so with a long breath and an angry exclamation, for he had that day seen a hand with a knife in it very near the golden braids of Erica Eagleson, and it seemed to him as if she alone were worth all the savages he had ever heard of.

He felt, and he expressed it strongly, that there was no blood whatever upon his hands, although he had sped three human lives since sunrise. He rode slowly homeward, and a hot supper was waiting for him. He saw Mrs. Eagleson's glance at the earth-stains on his hands and clothing, and the nod of intelligence she exchanged with Erica. They had no need to ask questions as to his errand, if they could have done so in the best of English.

It was a quiet night in that little camp. Even the rain that pattered upon the tent over the Eaglesons and upon the wagon-tilt which sheltered Chumley had nothing stormy in it after the terror and turmoil of the day. Gustav Eagleson himself slept fairly well, in spite of his bruised head and the fever of his wounded arm.

CHAPTER VII.

A CALM AFTER A STORM.

In the dark before the dawn, Chumley was in the saddle, determined to try for a deer before eating his breakfast.

"Jim and his men will be here to-day," he said, "to make a beginning on the house. They'll eat up all my provisions if I don't lay in an extra supply."

He got away from the camp, mounted and armed as his dusky adviser had suggested, without disturbing his guests.

"Never killed a deer in my life," he said, as he rode out through the mists and shadows, "but I believe I know how to shoot."

The two hounds were with him, scouring the dewy grass right and left in silent industry, but it was some time before they were rewarded for their pains. The air was a trifle chilly, but Chumley felt the hunter's fever warming fast in his veins. On he rode until he came into what appeared to be a long hollow. The grass was up to his saddle and the weeds were extraordinary.

"This must be what he called a dry slough," he said. "I'll try down it towards the open prairie.

If it were but a little lighter now. Seems to me I couldn't hit the side of a house through this haze."

A faint, gray light grew slowly in the very edge of the eastern horizon as he rode slowly on, following the indications of the tall herbage under his horse's feet. The two hounds, unused to the work they were engaged in, were out in the shorter grass on the higher ground to the left of the slough-bed, at the moment when Chumley's heart gave a sudden thump and his gun sprang to a level as if of its own accord.

An outlined shape, seen faintly through the fog, bounded from the grass at his right. Three bounds, while Chumley reined in his horse, and then the startled buck stood still for an instant and turned to look at the disturber of his morning nap. Loud sounded, on the left, the sudden baying of the stag-hounds catching the scent, and their first cry was followed by the double report of Chumley's gun, sending a hail of buckshot into the mist beyond him. That buck had loomed at least ten feet high in the dim light and its refraction, but the flying pellets found their mark.

The smitten deer dashed wildly down the slough, with the music of the hounds behind him, but that race could be but a short one. In about a minute more the game was down and Chumley was by it, knife in hand.

"Never shook so in all my life," he exclaimed, excitedly. "A rifle would have been utterly useless. Now I must do butcher work. It's to let the blood out, I've read about it, but I never saw it done."

He did it, however, and then he lifted the buck upon his horse. He did not try to mount, but led the animal, half frightened by his unaccustomed burden, all the way homeward. The sun was well up before he got there.

Before leaving his camp, Chumley had raked out the embers of the fire from the ashes and thrown some wood upon them.

"She will know what to do when she gets up," he said, referring to Mrs. Eagleson, but his two mastiffs seemed to hardly know what to do after they were left in charge.

It may have been their master's early absence which made them uneasy, but they ranged around instead of lying down. Just as the first light began to crimson the eastern sky in token of the coming sunrise, one of them marched to the door of the tent, stood still, threw up his big head and uttered an anxious howl, following it with a bark.

There was instantly a commotion in the tent, and the dog wagged his tail in canine satisfaction as soon as he heard human voices.

A minute or so more and Erica stepped forth, quickly followed by her mother. Both of the dogs danced around them eagerly, with loud barks of

recognition of their right to be there, and then the fellow who had wakened them walked gravely to the tent-door and looked in. There lay Gustav upon his mattress, wide awake and cheerful, but under wifely orders not to move a limb.

The dog saw him, but did not appear to be entirely satisfied with a man who lay so still. He walked in and up to the bed and smelled of him, but the secret of his uneasiness was out as soon as his nose had told him the truth concerning Gustav's bandages. A half howl, a whimper, and then a great brown paw was put out for Gustav's offered right hand to shake. Nobody can guess how much solid common sense there is in the mental operations of a really high-toned dog. He left the tent as soon as he had finished his investigations.

His companion had attended Erica when she went to the spring for water, and they both came and sat down near the fire to watch the preparations making for their master's breakfast.

It was as if they had understood Mrs. Eagleson's repeated declaration to Erica,—

"He will be sure to come back hungry. We owe him so much. I do wish we had something nice for your father."

She was to have her wish, even to a superabundant supply. She and Erica came and went, visiting the tent, looking at the horses, who were cropping the grass their long lariats brought within

their reach; but there were glances now and then at the woods and in other directions, as if memories of yesterday came with a suggestion of possible peril. What if the silence of that lovely and peaceful morning should be broken by such yells as they had heard by the other spring? That grove had been as shady and as beautiful as Chumley's. Who could tell what might happen when one Pawnee could suddenly multiply into five, each with a knife in his hand and a whoop on his lips?

That sort of thinking brought back to both of them swift mental pictures of the hero on horseback, and they had an increasingly strong desire to see him again.

He was coming now, at last, but so was somebody else, and the dogs began to bark in two directions at the same moment.

Mother and daughter exchanged rapid remarks in Swedish and the dogs in the mastiff tongue, while the arrivals drew nearer.

Chumley reached the camp-fire first, and threw down his buck as a full explanation of his morning absence. From the opposite prairie now came in an altogether unexplained visitor. It was the nameless old Indian, and this time he was riding a very serviceable-looking pony. He too must have been hunting that morning, but the buck he had killed was smaller than Chumley's. It lay before him on the pony, and it probably had not seemed so big

and remarkable to him through any mist as had the prize taken by the young hunter.

The old Indian rode straight in, unmindful of dogs or human beings, until he was near enough to Chumley to say,—

"How! Boy kill deer? Ugh! No. Boy find him dead. Indian kill deer. Squaw want meat."

"What'll you take for that one?" asked Chumley.

"Big squaw have fire. Coffee. Cook meat. Indian eat a heap. Indian deer for little squaw. She heap handsome. Heap look like old Indian."

A truly wonderful grin distorted his features as he asserted Erica's resemblance to himself, but he took the deer from his pony's back and laid it down before her. It was her venison, and she clearly understood that this was the same warrior who was a friend of Chumley's and had helped him kill the Pawnees. She drew a very long breath as she timidly held out her hand, and nobody could explain to her why Chumley was laughing. He glanced from her face to that of the grim savage, and the contrast gave a keen point to the dry humor of the latter.

"He can't be so bad a fellow," thought Chumley, "if there's humanity enough in him to admire that child."

"Good old Indian. Say little squaw eat deer and grow. So big, some day."

He pointed at Mrs. Eagleson as he spoke, but he evidently did not expect a reply in English. A very good one was shortly given him in the shape of coffee, bacon, and broiled venison. He evidently felt somewhat at home, for he not only inquired of Chumley as to the hurts of Gustav, but went to the tent to look at him and say "How;" but the real nature of his visit did not leak out until just as he was departing, a little while after breakfast.

"Boy listen," he said. "Blue-coat come by and by. Ask boy question. Say, 'See Pawnee go by?' Now, what boy say?"

"Tell them no. I suppose you mean United States Cavalry. No Pawnees around here. Go to the grove and look for 'em."

"Ugh! Go pretty soon. Now s'pose blue-coat say, 'Boy see old Potawatamy?' what boy say?"

"You mean if they ask if I've seen you around here? Well, all I can answer is that there was a very handsome old chap here. Don't know anything about him."

"Ugh! Good. Boy heap fool. Can't tell lie worth a cent. Old Indian great chief. Heap great brave. Blue-coat call him good Indian, but want him, maybe. Old chief no want blue-coat. Go lie down in bushes. They come. Go away."

"I think I understand," said Chumley, as his queer acquaintance rode away. "I can safely say I don't know his name or tribe. He may keep out

of harm's way for all I shall do. That shot of his was fired in the nick of time."

Erica regretted that she could not properly thank the old savage for his deer, but both she and her mother felt relieved when they saw him go.

He had a special errand in going, for he had asked no explanation of Chumley's assurance that no Pawnees were now in the grove by the other spring. He went right along to find out for himself.

He went directly to the grove, across prairie, following no path, and rode into it with his eyes flashing rapidly, right and left. A more peaceful-looking spot it would have been hard to find, now that the rain had done its washing.

"Ugh! Gone. Where gone? Boy no fool."

Neither was he, and the feet of Chumley's pack-horse had left marks which he was able to read without dismounting. No other eyes, white man's or Indian's, would have understood the meaning of the several traces of coming and going, but he had the clue. He followed the hoofmarks to the Post. There was quite a mound of fresh earth at the foot of it, and the veteran trailer soon detected the evidences of disturbance in the neighboring sod.

"Ugh!" said he. "Blue-coat no find 'em. No more Pawnee come. Grass grow. All cover up."

He turned his pony's head southerly, towards the timber, and urged him into a sharp canter. It was as if he had especial reasons for getting away from that vicinity.

Perhaps he had. About an hour later, Chumley was busily engaged in getting a prairie-plough out of his own wagon, and Erica was watching him as well as her playfellows the dogs would let her. Suddenly they all bounded away from her with a noisy announcement that somebody was coming.

"I declare!" exclaimed Chumley. "The old fellow was right. They're in uniform."

So they were, and not one of them was aware that their wet bivouac of the previous night had been inspected or their coming announced beforehand.

"Officer and six men. Well, I'll be glad to know all they can tell me."

Only a few minutes more and he was exchanging questions and answers with a bronzed, soldierly horseman, who introduced himself as "Lieutenant Ingalls, United States Cavalry," and had inquiries to make about a squad of peculiarly vicious Pawnees. They were part, he said, of a larger lot, the worst of their tribe, who refused to be kept upon the Reservation except by force, and were always in mischief of some sort. Their main body had been found and was receiving due attention. These five, after a hard spree in which they had gambled

away their possessions, had gone in this direction, it was understood. They were about the only Indians known to the officer from whom such settlers as Chumley and his "family" need have any fear.

Chumley's eyes danced a little at the mention of his family, for the glances of the lieutenant had gone towards the face of Erica a dozen times while he was talking.

"No danger of their attacking us, I hope," he said, and the lieutenant replied,—

"Not if you were on your guard, but they'd cut your throats quickly enough if they could do it and get away. They've no idea I'm after them."

"Will they resist capture?"

"Not for one moment. I almost wish they might all get killed before I find them. Great public service. Their own tribe would hardly be sorry."

"Would it not retaliate on the men killing them?"

"Their own band would. Sure as you live. You said you had seen nothing of them?"

"I did not say so. May I have your word of honor, if I tell you a thing which in my opinion should be kept a secret from their band?"

"Duty and the public service excepted."

"Let me ask you to dismount, then, and come to my tent."

"Evidently a gentleman," said the officer to him-

self, as he sprang down, and his men remained in their saddles while he followed Chumley. Mrs. Eagleson was in the tent-door, and as she stepped aside the lieutenant lifted his cap to her.

"There," said Chumley, pointing to Gustav's bandages. "That was the work of your Pawnees. He will soon be well, but it is no fault of theirs. He is a Swede. Her husband and Erica's father. No use to question him. He does not speak English."

"Will you tell me the whole affair?"

"Let me saddle a horse and ride with you. It's less than a mile to the spot."

Lieutenant Ingalls was all politeness to Mrs. Eagleson and Erica, and he listened to Chumley with studious courtesy, but he was intensely in earnest about probing the matter to the bottom. Chumley saddled his horse, and they rode together to the scene of the skirmish. The account of it was attended to with little interruption, but that very fact made it impossible to conceal the part taken by the unknown Indian, and at last the lieutenant quietly remarked,—

"How many did Eagleson kill?"

"Not any."

"The dogs pulled down one. You shot three. Who killed the other two?"

"An Indian among the bushes. I know nothing whatever about him."

"I do, then. There's a death feud between old Big Mouth and that band of Pawnees. Whether he was after them or they after him I can't guess."

"Who is he?"

"Good enough Indian. They say he was a Potawatamy chief once. Can't say just whose redskin he is just now. I don't want him, unless for this affair. But what became of the bodies?"

"Had a funeral at once," said Chumley. "If you'll come with me I'll show you."

The lieutenant was plainly suppressing something, but rode silently along until they halted at the "Post" and Chumley pointed at the grass:

"Your Pawnees are down there, all five of them. On my word and honor."

The lieutenant held out his hand, and his admiration broke forth:

"Mr. Chumley, I hardly know what to say. A most remarkable affair. Splendidly well done. Of course I must report all particulars to my commanding officer, but you will never be hurt by it. The Pawnees will never hear of their worthless bucks, and that's about all there is of it."

"Glad of that."

"But isn't the little Swede a beauty? I'd kill forty score of redskins before they should lay a hand on her head. The miscreants!"

"You are sure we are now in no further danger?"

"Perfectly safe, my dear sir. The frontier is

thoroughly quiet. Build your house. Put in your crops. You've made a fine beginning for a cemetery. I wish the rest of their band were all in it. Not the whole tribe, however."

"Any of them worth saving?"

"Certainly. Some fine fellows among them. That is, except when they are out on a war-path. Then they'd be as remorseless as—well, as your friend Big Mouth. By the way, don't call him by that name if you wish to keep on good terms with him. The Pawnees gave it to him. Find another."

"I may never see him again."

"Yes, you will. Those hills are said to be his range. I reckon your horses are safe, so far as he is concerned."

"He threatened to borrow them."

"Then he'll never touch them."

An invitation to remain and rest till after dinner was politely refused, but Chumley's statement was carefully reduced to writing before Lieutenant Ingalls led his squad of blue-coats away westward along the Pawnee Trail.

Chumley strove hard to convey to his friends the assurances of peace and safety given him, but Mrs. Eagleson's kindly face did not at once recover its sunshine. Erica's did better, with the aid of her fourfooted playfellows, but the day passed without the appearance of "Jim" and his log-house carpenters. All that could be done by the young settler

was to get out his farming tools and say to each of them in turn how entirely unskilled he was in the work to be performed with it.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PLUNGE INTO WILD LIFE.

A MAN thinks faster, sometimes, when he is in rapid motion. The brain of Mr. Mortimer Herries —Edward Payne, late of Sing Sing prison—worked at high pressure all the way to Chicago. He dreamed wilder dreams as he rode, and cast behind him more and more utterly the ties of all sorts which he had been born into. One thing he found it impossible to throw off at once. That was a quick, stinging suspicion of every pair of eyes which rested upon him, lest their owner should be looking through his present respectable appearance and discovering the ex-convict underneath. The striped garb was about the only thing of his criminal life that he had put away from him when his "time" was up.

Again and again he satisfied himself that the lady or gentleman taking note of him had no hidden thought or impertinent curiosity. He was entirely safe, he said to himself. He bore no external brand.

There was no fear that any pointing finger would ever single him out.

He did not know that several had gone far the other way, and had remarked upon him as a very fine-looking young man with an uncommonly intelligent face. A little pale they said, but seemingly in good health. Nervous temperament. An unpleasant expression about his eyes and mouth, but decidedly a handsome fellow in spite of it. Not until the train was within two hours' ride of Chicago did a short, broad-shouldered, quiet sort of man, with whom he had conversed somewhat in the smoking-room of the palace-car, come and sit down beside him.

"Soon there now," said Payne.

"We shall make the trip on time. I shan't ask you many questions, Mr. Payne. I'm one of Pinkerton's men. Have you been long out, or are you working up something heavy?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Didn't I say what I was? I've been trying to place you all day. Never saw you before, you know, but you might as well have worn a label. You'd better talk right out."

A fierce imprecation, only half suppressed, hissed between the grinding teeth of the ex-convict, but his common sense came to his assistance. There was nothing for it but to show his papers and conceal no part of his record.

"Out yesterday. Travelling west under an *alias*. No cause for detention known. I shall not molest you. Nobody but one of our fellows would know but what you were all correct. I suppose you'll know what to do, now you're spotted."

"I'm going to the ends of the earth!"

"Good place to go to. We have to follow fellows there, sometimes. You're not going there for any good, I can see that."

"You needn't preach to me."

"Not in my line. Take your own gait. You'll probably meet some of Pinkerton's men again soon enough. Yours isn't a case of repentance. Good-by. I'm watching some special business in another car. Got a warrant to serve, you know, before we pull up in Chicago."

The detective actually shook hands with him, as if to help him keep his secret from the other passengers, but he had driven a very painful iron into the soul of the ex-convict.

"My mind's made up now," he said to himself, "if it wasn't before. I must go on beyond the range of that sort of bloodhound. I must be more quiet and self-confident in my manner, I suppose. Still, he did say that only an expert like himself would have suspected me."

It was a bitter pill to take at any hands, nevertheless, and it produced an immediate effect.

Mr. Mortimer Herries, *alias* Edward Payne, al-

ready "spotted" by Pinkerton's men, arrived in Chicago that night and slept at a first-class hotel, but the city contained no such person at noon of the following day. Neither had any person of that name left the city in any direction, but a fine-looking young fellow registered as "Bradley Morford, of New York," was in a palace-car bound for St. Louis. He did not know that just as the train started an elderly lady on the platform turned away, remarking to herself,—

"Well, he's really off. I saw him get on board. The St. Louis office 'll have to keep track of him after he gets there. He's bent upon something or other. I can see it in his eye."

Something in the eyes of Mr. Bradley Morford was making a determined effort to conceal itself from other eyes and was fairly successful. It was the soul of a man incessantly saying to himself,—

"I am from Sing Sing, and I must appear to all men tremendously self-respecting, high-toned, and so forth."

Such an effort could but produce an intensely strained state of mind. A man who has been discovered and has reason to believe that he is watched, without knowing by whom, is in a terribly unpleasant kind of ambush.

"Herries—Payne—Morford," he said to himself. "No resemblance between the names. No use to try and disguise myself any other way. Is that car-

waiter one of Pinkerton's men? The conductor has eyes like needles. I'll talk with anybody that comes. It won't do to appear offish."

The sore state of his whole human nature actually aided him in taking on an air of almost haughty reserve which became him well, and none of his fellow-passengers broke through it. He knew very little of Pinkerton's men if he imagined that they would continually inform him of any "shadowing" they might do in his case. They would take just enough of pains, and no more, to satisfy their minds as to whether or not they had any business with him. There was not one of them who had any time to spare, as they expressed it, "in following an empty wagon."

Mr. Bradley Morford's arrival in St. Louis was duly noted, but he was unaware of being specially attended to his hotel. Neither did he know of a report carefully filed away in a pigeon-hole, the following evening, after its contents had been copied in a book. Part of the report read:

"Seemed not to be in communication with anybody. Not one of the Blake gang came near him. Purchased a repeating rifle, navy revolver,—description of both herewith, minute,—with ammunition. Nickel-mounted bowie-knife, buck-horn handle, nine-inch blade, no marks. He took the night train for Kansas City."

The law-protecting forces of civilized society

were finishing their work with this man. He had long since discovered that they were too strong for him. Now he knew more bitterly than ever that they were too watchful, and he was fleeing from them. He felt as if he were burning up with a mad fever to get away from all restraint, as if it were his personal enemy. In such a heated mental and moral atmosphere evil purposes ripen fast.

"War it is, then," said the ex-convict to himself, in his insane folly. "If every man's hand is against me, I'll play Ishmael with a vengeance. At all events all this nervousness will disappear when I find myself on horseback riding across prairie. I may as well make up my mind right here and now. I won't stop at any place short of the border, and I'll strike at the first chance that turns up."

What he meant by that could partly be interpreted by the evil light that came into his face while saying it. A more complete rendering was shortly to be given in a practical form.

Evil purposes ripened into evil deeds with wonderful rapidity.

It is also true that a vigorous and healthy human body soon rallies from the effects of a mere flesh wound. It was only a few days before Gustav Eagleson was able to sit in the door of Chumley's tent and watch "Jim" and three helpers at work with tremendous energy upon Chumley's log house.

The way in which that house was going up was

a marvel only to be accounted for by a promise of extra pay in case it should be finished within a given time.

It was a lazy way for a new settler to spend his time, and Gustav was inwardly chafing over his enforced idleness. He knew that Erica and her mother were away towards the woods for some reason, and he knew that Chumley had mounted his horse and ridden out on the prairie without any apparent purpose. It was a positive pleasure now to see him ride suddenly back again. How should Gustav or any of the rest guess that he had come for the purpose of completing a very rash and hasty bargain?

Chumley had not sold anything, but he was a very young man, and he had purchased a horse of an utter stranger. Such a fine animal, and so very cheap.

It had all come to pass in the easiest and most natural manner. Riding along the Pawnee Trail, eastward, with a dim idea lingering in his mind that he had much better be learning how to plough prairie, Chumley had met an uncommonly agreeable wayfarer.

A very gentlemanly person, well dressed, well mounted, led a second horse, whose points at once captured the fancy of the young settler. During a ride of half a mile, side by side, and a halt for a talk about the country and the prospects for its

improvement, the stranger's conduct and speech had been faultless. He had tendered a very recent newspaper very courteously; had refused an invitation to take dinner at Chumley's place; not one thing about him had been worthy of special note, unless it had been a slight stutter and hesitation of speech when he gave his name as "Mr. Mortimer Herries, of St. Louis." He talked horse freely. The one he rode was his preference. He meant the other for a remount. Bought him two days before of a man named Conover. Had not used him yet, and could not say anything about him. There was Conover's bill of sale and warranty, in due form. Price from him, two hundred dollars.

"I'll give you fifty for your bargain," had been Chumley's sudden exclamation. "Pay you the gold."

"Greenbacks are as good as gold," said the stranger; "but I want two seventy-five."

"Done," said Chumley; and that was why he now came back in such a hurry to get some money from the box in his wagon.

He took counsel with no man, but was off in less than two minutes towards the Trail.

Very off-hand and matter of course was the demeanor of Mr. Herries about so simple and every-day an affair as the sale of one horse. He shook hands with the purchaser and cantered away, like a man who was in no great hurry but who had a

journey before him. He was well out of Chumley's hearing before he exclaimed, aloud,—

"One name is as good as another, but that was a slip of the tongue. If anybody comes to claim that horse from him, he'll have a good time hunting up somebody by the name of Conover. On the whole, my first stroke was a pretty good one, but I'd better not camp any too early."

He was very quickly hidden by the forest in which the Trail disappeared, but by that time Chumley was back at his own tent, showing his purchase to Gustav.

There is fascination enough in any newly-purchased horse to draw a gang of men from their work, pay or no pay. It was not long before Jim and his three helpers were helping Gustav to admire that animal instead of fitting doors and windows. All admitted that such a bay as that, six years old, sixteen hands high, without a blemish, was cheap at two hundred and seventy-five dollars. Jim, however, had been a surveyor's assistant, and he surveyed the prize very thoroughly and deliberately. Then he took out a card of tobacco from his pocket, cut off a deeper slice than was his custom, and remarked,—

"Mr. Chumley, that's a good hoss. Did he say his name was Harris?"

"Or something like it."

"And he bought him of a man named Conover,

and paid him two hundred, and you got him for two seventy-five. Well, I don't know. Things will happen."

"What do you mean, Jim?" said Chumley, with an uneasy feeling, that was fostered by the dubious expression of Jim's face.

"Well, I don't know. I don't pretend to say. Only I reckon Conover lost more money on that hoss than Harris made on him."

"Do you know the horse?"

"Well, I don't know. 'Pears to me I do. Old Jedge Bunce, of Cross Prairie, he raised him. He vallied him at five hundred. Wouldn't have took a cent less, for the jedge is forehanded. He is. Conover lost money on that hoss."

"There's his bill of sale."

"Writes an extrornary good hand. Reckon it's all right. I don't know any Mr. Conover."

"Do you mean to say there's anything wrong about the horse?"

"Well, I don't know. I don't pretend to know. But if old Jedge Bunce was to come and see the hoss he could tell ye a heap more than I could."

That was pleasant, but Mr. Herries was gone, no man could guess whither. There was no good ground yet for following him. None for detaining him one moment from his travels for business or pleasure. The bargain was a good one, and Mr. Conover may have been in need of money. That

is, as Chumley said to himself, "unless Mr. Conover should turn out a skilful invention of Mr. Herries or some other man."

Jim said as much to his helpers, but it was nearly sundown before any of them knew more about that bay horse. Then they all knew a great deal, for Judge Bunce, of Cross Prairie, and a deputy sheriff spent that night at Chumley's place. In the morning they ate breakfast with him, and when they rode away they led with them the uncommonly good bargain.

The young settler had been taken in by a very elegant and accomplished horse-thief, and all the loss was his own. The owner had followed fast and far upon discovering the theft, inquiring all the way for a land-buyer by the name of Morford. Chumley remarked with strong emphasis,—

"Know him again? I'd know his face among a thousand. Handsome face, too,—but there was something in his eye. I'd know him!"

"Well," said Jim. "I don't know. I don't pretend to know. But I reckon the next stranger that comes along here with a hoss to sell 'll have to prove property before he gets his money. That chap's cleared out scot-free."

"Perhaps," said Chumley; "but I may meet him, some day."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PAWNEE OUTLAWS.

A HUNDRED years, one after another, make little change on a prairie or in a forest. Grass grows and withers. Leaves come and go. Unless the settler's plough or the woodman's axe comes to disturb the old order of things, there are no new features.

Even four years, however, will work a vast change in human beings and in any landscape whereon they are busy. Four full years went by after the events narrated in the beginning of this story, and again there had come and blossomed the brightest and fairest kind of spring.

With it had come much business and work to all men, and apparently a duty of some perplexity to a pair of United States cavalry officers. They were discussing it together by a table in a plainly-furnished room at the headquarters of an army post, with a pile of papers before them. One wore gold oak-leaves upon his shoulder-straps and the other a pair of golden bars, but their uniforms gave token of much active service.

"It's a rough record, captain," said the major. "Indian agents, sheriffs, citizens. And yet, do you

know, if we should catch Jerry McCord and turn him over to a judge and jury, I don't believe they could prove one of these things against him."

"My notion is that the settlers 'll hardly trouble judge and jury with him. We've nothing to do with that."

"Not after a sheriff relieves us of the responsibility, but those Pawnees must be brought back to the Reservation. They won't show fight. The only trouble is to find them. Better strike for the old Pawnee Trail, following the ranges till you reach it. You'll hear of them somewhere."

"Isn't that too far south?"

"Their last strike was up here away, northerly," said the major, with his finger on the map. "I've sent the lieutenant with ten men in that direction. Jerry's cunning would take him well away, after such an infamous piece of business as that."

"Such a man is worse than any redskin. They say he was born a gentleman. Good education, fine manners, good-looking sort of fellow. Young, too."

"He's been the pest of this region for three years, anyhow. He furnishes brains for that gang. Not a white man among 'em but himself. He'll hang just as well as if he were not so good-looking."

"We've no warrant for him."

"Every sheriff's deputy has. Bring in the Paw-

nees at all hazards. Call him a Pawnee and bring him in."

"If anything happens to him?"

"Accidents will happen, captain. He's a desperado. A disgrace to the name of white man. Turn him over to the civil authorities, dead or alive!"

"Your blood's up about him," said the captain, as he arose and took up the papers belonging to him.

"Captain," said the major, "it's enough to set a colder man than I am a-boiling. He may not have touched man or woman with his own hands, but you know what his Pawnees did. Make a thorough piece of work if you can."

"I shall do my duty," said the captain, touching his hat. He and his commanding officer were evidently close friends, but he did not deem it necessary to say to him what he said to himself after mounting his horse:

"Accidents will happen. I'm afraid there's a good many accidents getting ready for Jerry McCord."

A sergeant, a corporal, and nine well-mounted men in blue rode behind the captain. There was talk among them as they went along. They knew what errand they were on. It was a sort of scrub-work, they said, but there might be some excitement in it. Better than loafing around a camp.

At all events there was but one opinion among them as to the necessity for finally rooting out Jerry McCord's band of Pawnee horse-thieves. More than one story passed from lip to lip of deeds more evil than the stealing of horses.

The major had correctly informed the captain that he had before him several days of pretty industrious riding and searching. He had made a fairly good calculation in other respects, and it was a pity he could not have sent his efficient subordinate directly to a secluded little valley among the hills of Western Nebraska.

A very pretty place it was. A sort of natural "open," surrounded by a rugged country which protected it from intrusion, yet not too far removed from outlying settlements. Its appearance that morning was exceedingly picturesque, and it was a pity that no artist could seize the opportunity for a sketch of it.

There were five rude huts along the bank of a rivulet which ran through the valley. In and around the huts were a score or more of human beings, mostly males. No small children were visible. The garments worn by all were such as a lot of vagabond squaws and Indians could beg or steal on that frontier. Perhaps the proudest squaw among those lodges sat before her door in a damaged red silk dress which had been made for a much smaller woman, but her next neighbor had a

red shawl and a straw bonnet, and wore a green veil around her neck. A tall male redskin lying on the grass near her also wore a bonnet. There were bright ribbons and a stuffed parroquet upon that bonnet, and some settler's wife had probably missed it from her wardrobe on getting home some mournful day.

It was a time of peace and utter idleness. There were many horses, of various grades and values, feeding upon the abundant grass of the valley, and no need was of fence or hedge, for it was all "commons." Except for dirt and squalor and the evil faces of men and women, the remaining most prominent feature of that encampment was the number and apparent currish worthlessness of its dogs.

And this was the home and hiding-place of Jerry McCord's band of vagabond Pawnees, but there was no white man in the valley that morning.

Perhaps the nearest member of the ruling race was a man who was riding along the Pawnee Trail, eastward, towards the point where it came out of the wooded ranges upon level ground. He had already reached a place where the forest was sufficiently open for him to leave the Trail and push in among the trees, and he seemed to draw a breath of relief when he did so, remarking,—

"Haven't met a man. Nobody hereaway would

know me, but I don't care to be seen till all my scouting's finished."

He was a very handsome fellow, of less than thirty years of age. His dark, sun-bronzed features were full of intelligence, and his black eyes were uncommonly brilliant, while his muscular frame gave promise of activity and endurance. He wore his beard and moustache untrimmed, but there were no signs of any neglect of personal appearance. The neat blue suit, the broad-brimmed Panama hat, the black silk handkerchief around his throat, the well-made boots and spurs, the good horse and saddle under him, all combined to give him almost too jaunty an exterior for an ordinary settler of the Nebraska frontier.

Just before he wheeled in among the trees he halted and leaned forward as if looking along the Trail. It was a sudden movement, and he may have heard something. At all events his face underwent a strange and instantaneous transformation. The black eyes glittered with a fierce and cruel light. Corrugations unnoticeable before sprang out upon his broad forehead, seeming to flatten it and giving the idea of a panther ready to spring.

The beauty was all gone, for this was the face of a devil. Even the luxuriant growth around the mouth failed to conceal the evil will expressed by it.

A moment more, the temporary disturbance dis-

appearing, a graceful, smiling horseman rode on among the trees.

He did not ride more than a quarter of a mile before he again halted, and now he sprang lightly to the ground. As he did so, his blue frock coat swung back, and prying eyes could have seen enough of the glitter of silver and steel to know that the man carried weapons. He fastened his horse to a sapling and went forward on foot, saying to himself, as he did so,—

"It's a good while since I've paid a visit to Chumley's place. It cost him something the last time. So it did the first. That was a neat operation, but old Bunce got back his bay. I don't believe Chumley has the ghost of an idea that his sorrel mare was scooped by Jerry McCord, or that Jerry ever sold him a horse. I hope he's got some good stock on hand this time."

If he were now proposing to obtain information upon that point, he went at it with extreme caution. No Indian scout could have slipped forward more circumspectly than he did until the increasing light among the woods beyond him testified that the edge of the forest was nearly reached.

More slowly now, his black eyes flashing around him in all directions, he passed from trunk to trunk of the tall, primeval trees, until he could look out from the last safe cover upon the open country beyond.

There was no reason visible why this man should be afraid to meet other men face to face, and there was no peril to any living thing in what he now saw before him.

A substantial log farm-house stood but a short distance from the outermost, straggling clumps of hickories. There were fenced lots on either side of it, and fields of maize and grain beyond. If Jerry McCord had come to inquire about quadrupeds, there they were, quietly feeding in the fenced lots. Only one cow was to be seen, but there were several horses. One mare had a colt at her side. It was a very pretty rural picture, but its present observer only remarked of it,—

"Just so. We'll have every hoof of 'em yet. I'll set a watch to-morrow, and the first time Chumley's away from home we'll make a haul."

There was more greed than malice in the smile with which he discussed with himself his intended raid, but just at that moment a sound came to his ears which seemed, in a manner, to knock him down. At all events it caused him to throw himself flat on the earth behind the trunk of a fallen tree, through some raspberry-vines which caught at his beard as he plunged among them.

He was hidden in an instant, and the sound grew nearer, louder and clearer. It had been sweet enough from the first, for it was a full-throated lilt of song, and the voice of the singer

had in it a power and richness that is not heard every day, in or out of the woods.

Jerry listened for a full minute, in utter astonishment, before he exclaimed in a loud whisper,—

"That's it. Why didn't I think? It's one of them Swedes. No wonder I couldn't make it out. I must have a good look at her, anyhow."

There was no difficulty whatever in obtaining a full view of the songstress, for she came along among the trees in absolute security that she was neither seen nor heard. She stood still, in her unsuspecting freedom, within twenty feet of Jerry's log and raspberries, and turned to send her music back through the woods, as if she were studying the effect of sound in such an auditorium.

She was of medium height, a perfect blonde, save for a shade of reddish chestnut in the superabundance of her braided golden hair. Her cheeks were full of color, and as she turned her blue eyes towards his hiding-place, there sank into the dark soul of Jerry McCord the idea that in all his life he had never before seen anything one-half so beautiful as this young girl from the Norse country.

Something of the evil went out of his face and eyes as he looked, and for one short moment this expression grew almost manly. If intense admiration of maiden beauty had been his first emotion, it was followed quickly by another, and his second

thought stung him like an adder. The girl's face wore the light of utter innocence and was lofty with its pride, and these are terrible things for an evil man to look upon. They are treasures which cannot be his, because they shrink from his coming, and they wither at his touch, unless they are strong enough to repel him.

Jerry McCord's eyes flashed and his bosom rose and fell. He made a slight movement as if to arise, but sank back again. The song was dying away in a ripple of soft music as he said to himself, almost aloud,—

"Why shouldn't I speak to her? Who is to hinder me? I'll do it;" but at that moment a voice a little like that of a trombone came from the edge of the woods:

"Erica? Erica?" other words followed, and they were evidently a reproving summons, but whether they were Swedish or some other tongue Jerry did not know. She answered them cheerily with her voice and obediently with her feet, and they had fully warned her hidden admirer to lie still. He slowly arose, as soon as he was sure she could no longer get a glimpse of him. He even scouted from tree to tree after her for a little distance, but then he stopped suddenly.

"If that's her father," he said, "he's a big one. Chumley's with him. Glad I didn't show myself; but isn't she a beauty!"

He seemed almost bewildered for a moment, as if he had unexpectedly looked upon a being of another and better world than the one he lived in. Then the soul of the thief came flashing into his face, and it was easy to read the already half-formed determination that he would steal Erica very much as if she were an uncommonly valuable horse,—worth trouble and risk.

"I'll find some way of speaking to her. I must learn all there is to be learned, though, before I tell the Pawnees what my plan is. We've got to be doing something."

CHAPTER X.

A VERY SUDDEN LOVER.

Jerry McCord turned away from watching Erica and walked rapidly to the spot where he had left his horse. If the purposes he had declared were to be carried out, he had work before him. Both the live-stock and the young lady were evidently so well protected that the work would involve risk as well as enterprise. It was no wonder, therefore, that his handsome face should testify strongly to the activity of his excited brains.

He rode to the Pawnee Trail and followed it westward. It did not itself climb fast, but the land

on either side did, becoming craggy and wooded, testifying to the pioneering genius of the bisons who discovered so good a pass through that range of hills. He did not follow its windings among them for more than four miles before he wheeled to the left among the trees, and a few rods more brought him into a pretty well-marked path, whose junction with the Trail was scientifically covered up from casual observation. It led him, for half an hour's walk, through dense woods and narrow defiles, and then one of these widened right and left, and before him was the hidden camp of his chosen associates in all its picturesqueness and brutalities.

A group gathered quickly around him as he rode in and dismounted, but that was all the greeting extended by rascality to its leader. The hard-featured barbarians listened in stolid silence to all he chose to tell them, and it was quickly evident that he had hastened back to that camp to prevent any of them from trying plans of their own in the neighborhood of Chumley's. It was a place containing good things for all of them, but the management must be left to himself, rigidly.

There were unanimous grunts of assent at the conclusion of his injunctions, and he added,—

"Soon as I've had something to eat, I'll ride right back and see what more I can do to-day."

"Ugh!" responded a one-eyed brave. "Eat a heap. Jerry all right."

There was a sort of rude abundance in that camp. A squaw made coffee for the hungry head-man of her band, while three others broiled trout and venison for him, and there was even a supply of army-bread, but there were no vegetables. He ate heartily, and then a fresh horse was brought to him, and he was once more in the saddle. He left behind him the idea that he should be gone overnight, and rode back to the Pawnee Trail.

Genuine human love will sometimes kindle suddenly, but it rarely blazes at once to a fire of any great size. The selfish greed, coveting something precious which it happens to look upon, and which is often mistaken for love, can reach its most grasping condition in an hour or so.

Jerry McCord swore that he was in love, suddenly, desperately, with the unknown beauty who had sung so sweetly. He had a strange idea that his own desperate career was that of a sort of hero of border romance, and now there was positive exhilaration in the romantic nature of his present adventure. It hardly occurred to him that he, the wild, elegant, daring, dashing, and very handsome rover, could fail of fascinating the bewildered girl upon whom he might choose to bring his fascinations to bear. At the same time he was keenly aware that his Pawnees would be unprofitable companions for him while he should be courting.

Scouting around among trees and bushes in a

vague hope that a young lady may come, and troubled by much doubt if she would do so, was a good process for the promotion of such a fever of vanity as had taken possession of Jerry. It grew more and more intense all that afternoon, until he felt as if it must already have had some effect upon Erica. He had heard her called by that name, and now he called her by it, as if practising its most winning modulations, while he was preparing himself to tell his tale of love. He also settled in his prudent mind what name he should give himself for her to call him by.

Hour after hour went by and Erica did not come, but somebody else did. This time it was not a young lady, but a somewhat young and frisky cow.

"That's it," exclaimed Jerry; "if I can coop up that cow Erica will be likely to come for her, and I'll have a chance of my own making."

It was a stroke of genius worthy of a hero of romance who dared not call openly at the residence of his lady-love. The mild-eyed animal who had rashly ventured too far under the shade of the trees was driven yet farther. She did not seem even startled by so unexpected a meeting, and went along peaceably enough at first. As time went by, however, she unfolded the fact that she had a feminine will of her own, and she gave more and more trouble to the romantic human lover who proposed

to make "bait" of her. He had no rope to tie her with, and it looked very much as if she was minded to go to the house and report what was going on in the woods. Her feelings grew yet stronger towards sunset, and Jerry was compelled to all but wrestle with that homesick cow. By steady persistence, however, he succeeded in detaining her long enough for his brilliant stratagem to work.

It was truly a gem of strategy. Other cattle came in from the prairie and the pasture-lot at their proper time, but Erica's own favorite heifer arrived not with them. She had been seen near the edge of the timber, and Chumley offered to go and hunt her up. Erica laughingly refused his proposal and hurried away on what she said was her own errand. So it was, but so little did she know of its real nature that she walked on, singing a Swedish song, straight into the trap which had been baited for her with that cow. She nevertheless owed something to the obstinacy of the latter. At the first sound of the carol the cow lowered her horns and made so bold a charge at her oppressor that she got past him and trotted briskly towards the music.

Jerry McCord did not run, but he was forced to walk undignifiedly fast in order to meet Erica where her heifer did.

That was a moment of profound surprise. The surprise, in fact, had already cut short the carol,

for her first glimpse of the stranger had brought into her mind the hasty question,—

"He didn't mean to steal her, did he?"

Jerry did not know that, and the suspicion vanished now, as he raised his hat in a salutation loaded down with the most profound respect and admiration. She returned the bow mechanically, but its coming then and there was a somewhat startling incident in the humdrum experience of an unsophisticated young lady dwelling on that lonely prairie. Her cheeks crimsoned for no cause whatever, and her parted lips uttered no sound. She felt very much like following the example of the cow, who had now started on a heavy run for the house. It was not a long run, but it had consequences of some importance to Jerry McCord. He was too far away to hear Erica's mother say to her husband,—

"There! There's that cow. Erica might hunt her for an hour, Gustav. Go down to the edge of the woods and shout for her to come home."

Gustav put down the pail of milk he had brought, and moved away somewhat leisurely to obey his wife. His walk, added to the cow's run, gave Jerry McCord all the time he was to have, but he used it with notable energy. He had feared that such a first interview was likely to be brief, and he struck at once.

No thought whatever concerning him had yet

taken shape in Erica's mind, now that she was sure that the cow was safe, but the reverential bow he began with terminated, and a very good-looking face put on all the expressiveness its owner was master of while he exclaimed, in a voice she was sure she had never before heard,—

"Erica! Erica! I have seen the most beautiful woman in the world——"

"Sir!" she exclaimed, in an altogether involuntary interruption. "What? Where did you come from?"

Great as was her astonishment, there was nothing unpleasant about him, and his manner was not calculated to arouse fear. Erica was very young; she was uncommonly ignorant of the wicked world and its ways, and this was the most unexpected of all good-looking men.

"Erica!" he again exclaimed, with passionate earnestness and outstretched hands, "I will tell you all about myself hereafter. My name is Edward Payne. I am a gentleman. A man of honor. I have seen you and I have loved you. For days and days I have watched in these woods, seeking an opportunity to speak to you. At last that opportunity has come, and you must hear me!"

He had lied more or less, and he had said nothing about the cow, but she had heard him. While doing so she had looked at him somewhat unsteadily, for she was walking backward and watch-

ing her footsteps that she might not be tripped up by anything, stick or stone. Her surprise was so overwhelming that it made her do the wisest thing she could, for she did not reply to him by a syllable. He had followed her retreat, and now he sprang forward and caught her by the wrist, pleading with desperate earnestness,—

"Wait, Erica! Hear me!"

She could not have denied that he was handsome or that he pleaded well, and a declaration of love is at any time a wonderful thing for a girl to hear. It was particularly wonderful just now, coming without any warning and from an utter stranger. Still, the hand upon her wrist sent a thrill of fear over her so sharply that she screamed aloud,—

"Sir! Sir! I do not know you! I—I do not wish to hear you. Let me go!"

"Will you not listen to me for one short moment, Erica?"

"No, sir! I won't hear anything!"

"I love you. Oh, Erica!"

"I don't care if you do. Let go of my hand!"

"Oh, Erica!"

Just those very words sounded at that moment at the edge of the woods in the trombone voice of her father:

"Oh, Erica! The cow is home!"

"That's my father. I'll call him. I'll call Mr. Chumley,—my mother! Sir, let me go!"

"Erica," said he, persistently, "I must leave you now, but we shall surely meet again. Do not forget me. I am a man of honor, but there are reasons why I cannot now come to your house openly——"

"Father!" she shouted, and at that word she was free. She saw a blue suit disappearing rapidly among the trees while she was rubbing a hand which had been kissed against her will. Her first romance had come to her, and she had only a woman's keen natural instincts to tell her how tremendously absurd it all was. Her face flushed and paled, her bosom rose and fell, and she stood still for half a minute to calm herself, now that the intruder had disappeared. As for Gustav, he had mistaken her shout for an answer to his summons, and was merely waiting for her. She was glad he was there, and yet she felt that he was not the precise person she most wished to see.

"Father," she exclaimed, "I want to see mother!"

"What's the matter? Have you been frightened by anything?"

"A man! He spoke to me. He is gone. I must see mother."

That brief conversation had been in pure Swedish, and all slowness had vanished from Gustav's movements. He sprang away among the trees to hunt for the man who had so scared his daughter, in spite of all her assurances that she did not know in

what direction he had retreated. Whatever that may have been, Gustav missed it entirely, and it was just as well that he did so, considering that he was entirely unarmed. He returned in a few minutes, convinced that a forest offers perfect hiding-places, but he was in error about that. Jerry McCord had not hidden. He had but walked away rapidly towards the spot where his horse was tied, and had no idea that anybody would follow him.

"I've made a good beginning," he said to himself. "Of course she was startled. I expected that. Her father's coming cut me short a little. She will listen to all I have to say next time."

The idea was very strong upon him that he had made an impression, and beyond all doubt he had done so. Possibly it was not precisely what he imagined, however, for it sent Erica to her mother with a full account of the occurrence, while the first thing done by Gustav on reaching the house was to take down a double-barrelled gun from its hooks and shake his head over it with a deep-chested growl which boded buckshot for some unknown "game."

On the whole, there were promises of obstacles to be in the way of future meetings between the romantic horse-thief and the beautiful object of his self-confident devotion. It is an old proverb that the course of true love itself never did run smooth, and in this case it might be made to apply to the counterfeit.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MUNRO OUTFIT.

HUNDREDS of travelling parties, cavalcades, migrations, moccasined or booted, hoofed or cloven-footed, had from time to time trodden the ancient pathway known as the Pawnee Trail. Not many among them, however, had been more worthy of note than one which plodded along, almost but not quite in sight of the wooded western hill ranges, on the second day after Erica and her cow had so romantic an adventure.

It was also the second day of June, and the weather was warm.

The outfit to be remarked upon consisted of four large, tilted wagons, each drawn by four yoke of well-to-do oxen. With these as a sort of main body, it also consisted of half a dozen cows that followed the wagons; two women on horseback that followed the cows; one mounted man on each side of the train and one in advance; one large dog well in advance of that foremost horseman; a parrot in his cage, swinging from the tilt of the head wagon; and a huge, gray Thomas cat who sat on the seat under the parrot, as if keeping an eye on the oxen.

Only the rearmost wagon contained passengers.

Every now and then a voice came from it that seemed to call for attention to a discontented matron whose eight Berkshire pigs refused to keep still. Her appeals from time to time called jocular remarks about "Jemima and her family" from the ladies on horseback, and now and then one of these rode nearer to see if all was well in "the cabin."

Those women were a remarkably bright and healthy-looking pair, black-eyed, black-haired, brisk and tidy. The younger may have been nineteen, and promised to be the very pattern of her mother; and the latter may have been forty, but had not lost her roses, and had an air of being where she was in the rear because of having energy enough to drive that entire outfit right along before her.

It needed driving, for the oxen were fat and heavy fellows that showed no signs of the long journey behind them. Excellent care had been given them, but it could not have been by the long, lank, take-the-world-easy kind of man whose loose legs dangled on either side of the horse to the left of them. Neither was there much of a business appearance about the rider on the right, for he was looking through a huge pair of green goggles at all the world around him, but never at the oxen. They plodded on so steadily, perhaps, as a matter of habit; perhaps because they knew of that black-eyed woman behind them; perhaps because the foremost team

was lazily following the movements of the horseman ahead and the big dog. Every now and then, as the wagon that he adorned gave a lurch, the parrot would balance himself or take a swing, and shout queer English at the cat or the oxen:

"Me-a-ow! Yow! Hip,—haw,—gee,—g'lang! Pretty Polly! Oh, don't!"

Prairie travelling excited him even more than it did Jemima, but the cat took it all in dignified repose.

The ladies, older as well as younger, seemed to be continually on the watch for objects of interest, and their glances went behind as well as forward.

"Mother," suddenly exclaimed the latter, "just as I said."

"Man coming?"

"Man on horseback. He's hidden by a knoll now."

"There he comes, Jessie; I see him. I hope he'll turn out to be somebody that knows something about the country. Your father and your uncle take things too much for granted."

"Everything's as beautiful as it was painted so far. There——"

Her mother was at that moment looking at her, and not at the landscape or the coming rider. If her eyes correctly presented the thought in her mind, it might have been translated,—

"And the most beautiful thing here, after all, is

the daughter we have brought out to hide her in this frontier solitude."

One horseman came galloping after them along the Trail, and no more female heads turned to see him come. He left behind him something which had escaped all the eyes in that train as it went by a reedy, weedy hollow, behind a high roll. Until the train had gotten well beyond it there had been four men in that hollow, all dismounted, and there had been strange talk among them before either of them was again in the saddle. Now three of them were out of sight of the train, making a long detour to the left, but riding as if they had an appointment to keep with somebody, and of those three not one was a white man.

The horseman who left his companions to follow the immigrant train sobered his pace as he drew nearer, remarking to himself,—

"Ladies, eh? Glad of that. I can learn all I want to from them."

At that moment Jessie said to her mother,—

"He is very near us now."

"Ride on and tell your uncle to come back and talk with him. I'll speak to your father."

Both errands were begun at the word, but Jessie's was delivered first.

"Uncle John, somebody's coming."

"Coming? Yes,—well,—suppose there is. I'll have a talk with him. Only we don't know the

character of the people we meet. So far as I've seen, it's all a kind of mutual admiration society and there isn't a sinner on the whole prairie."

"He has almost caught up. Mother is speaking to father about him."

So she was, and she was saying,—

"Now, husband, I want you to get all the information you can out of him. Be particular and make him tell all he knows about Mr. Chumley. It's very important that we should know what sort of a man our next neighbor is."

"My dear, the agent and the surveyor spoke of him very highly indeed."

"So they did of everything and everybody. I'd like to hear the other side."

"Perhaps we can get some of it. Here he is."

Only a minute and a half elapsed after that before the solitary horseman had introduced himself as Mr. Edward Payne, and had discovered that all these people bore the name of Munro.

Mrs. Munro's piercing black eyes had criticised him from head to foot. They had also taken instant notice that he seemed almost unable to remove the gaze of his own from the face of Jessie. He was a dashing, handsome fellow, well dressed, well mounted, and overflowingly polite.

"Did he know the country?"

Certainly. All of it. He owned property farther west, and was now on his way home. He was there-

fore in some haste, lest he should not get there before night.

"Mr. Payne," said Mrs. Munro herself, after her husband had neglected to ask, "do you know a man by the name of Chumley? Our land joins with his."

"Yes," said Uncle John. "What's his character?"

"I can't say I know him," said Payne, slowly. "I know of him. I'd rather not speak of him. It isn't safe to say what one thinks of some men."

"I see," said Uncle John. "Violent and all that."

"My life wouldn't be safe for a day, I'm told."

"You may depend upon our silence," said Mrs. Munro. "Is there really anything against him? Will he be a bad neighbor?"

"Madame," said Payne, bowing very respectfully, "I know nothing whatever against Mr. Chumley. I do not know why his wife does not live with him. I do not know why men are afraid to quarrel with him. I do not know but what he obtained all his property honestly. Nobody could prove by me that he ever played a game of cards in his life. Nobody on this prairie ever knew where he came from, or anything about him."

"That's not a good character for any man to have," said Uncle John, thoughtfully, and Payne added,—

"I do not see how he could fail to live at peace with such neighbors as he is about to have."

That bow was at Jessie, and was so pointed and full of expression that it brought the color to her face.

During a full half-hour the stranger was detained by a cross-examination concerning men and things on that frontier, and Mr. Munro finally declared to him,—

"We are greatly obliged. You have told us more than we knew about a great many important matters. Call and see us after we get settled."

"I shall do so with pleasure," replied Payne, with a powerful glance at Jessie; "but I must hurry forward now."

Once only, during that time, had the advance-guard of the Munro outfit ridden back for a look at the stranger and to be introduced as Mr. Perry Munro. The dog did not come back and was not introduced.

Perry could hardly have been "of age," but Payne was justified in saying to himself, "This is the captain, or I'm mistaken. Unless his mother is."

At all events he had attained a height of full six feet and an uncommon breadth of shoulder. His black moustaches were as yet soft and downy, and his rosy cheeks were smooth. His wide-brimmed felt hat rested upon a profusion of jetty curls. His

merry black eyes were as searching as his mother's and as brilliant as those of Mr. Payne, and they added to his other tokens of energy and force a strong suggestion of a quick and fiery temper. He and Payne looked one another smilingly in the face for a minute or so, while he asked questions about the nearest good spot to camp in, and then he rode back to his place behind the dog. To him he remarked,—

"Bob, we shall reach that grove before noon;" and to himself he added, "I can't guess what it is that makes me distrust that fellow. If he ever comes around our place I shall watch him."

Bob the dog was an English mastiff of the largest size, and just the fellow to have around in case there should be anybody to watch. Tawny, deep-chested, and lion-faced, he was as handsome as his master.

Mr. Payne swung his hat cheerily as he now galloped past Perry and shouted,—

"You'll be on your own land by night. Hope you'll find it all you could ask. Good-day."

"Good-day," said Perry. "Wish you a pleasant journey."

Nevertheless he was dimly aware that the man Payne had understood the glance of dislike with which that farewell was accompanied.

There were no disparaging remarks made about Mr. Payne by the other members of the Munro

family, but it was quite natural that they should discuss the news he left behind him rather than himself. It was not long before they were all back in their customary places, and now even Uncle John urged the oxen. The sun indicated that the time for a mid-day halt was nearly upon them.

That country is full of capital camping-grounds, and the bisons who marked out the Pawnee Trail knew every spring and grove. Payne had assured Perry that it led into that sort of a place quickly, and now a large and promising group of oaks was visible, right on their line of march. It seemed to call for Bob's investigation, and he at once dashed forward. He paused under the first oak to send back a deep "woof," in token that he was pleased with what he had found, and in two minutes more he and Perry were looking down into a fine pool of water fed by a capital spring.

"You are right about it, Bob," said Perry. "It's just the spot. We'll rest here awhile, and we'll get to Chumley's Post long before sundown."

The sight of the grove had summoned Jessie forward also, but she had reined in her horse at the side of Uncle John to ask him,—

"What are you staring at now, Uncle John? Do you see anything new?"

"Nothing yet, Jessie. I think I shall wear my blue glasses this afternoon. There is almost too much green."

Jessie's answering laugh and the lift of her bridle sent her horse forward to the side of her brother.

"Jessie," said he, "I wish we could pick up this place, spring and all, and put it down again on our own land."

"So do I. This is lovely."

"Well, if the land agent didn't lie, we shall have all the timber we need, and water too."

"Mr. Payne said so. But, Perry, isn't it disgusting that we are to have such a man as Chumley for a neighbor?"

"A chap that can't live with his wife?"

"Horrid old fellow!" exclaimed Jessie, sharply, evidently imaging some unpleasant, middle-aged reprobate. The strength of her impression even added needless energy to her independent way of dismounting and of caring for her own horse and her mother's while the latter kindled a fire. It was wonderful how quickly the sticks came into order and blazed up. There was a good glow by the time Uncle John had examined the pebbles by the spring and had decided that they were "mostly limestone."

The cat sprang down from his perch and darted away on a hunt of some sort, and the parrot from his shouted "water, water," after the oxen, as Perry unyoked them and led them away to pick grass for themselves under the guardianship of Bob.

Jessie was yet busy with her own equine favorite

when a series of loud complaints from two of the wagons seemed to be especially addressed to her, and she replied to them,—

"You needn't squeal like that, Jemima. This is your last day's ride. You'll be rooting on your own land to-morrow. Polly, you keep still. You can't have one mouthful till you've said Pawnee."

"Hip,—hip!" screamed the parrot. "Me-a-ow. Poll want cracker."

Jemima's time for attention had not come, although she repeated her demands; but in a minute or so Jessie stood on the tongue of the wagon, in front of Polly's cage, with no one to tell her how pretty she looked as she insisted,—

"Say it, you old rascal!"

"Old rascal," echoed Poll.

"Pawnee! Pawnee!" urged Jessie.

"Paw,—me-a-ow,—rascal!" squawked the parrot, angrily.

"Pawnee!"

"Poll want cracker. Pawnee,—pawnee,—pawnee,—me-a-ow!"

"You've got it. I heard you practising it along the road. You obstinate old bird!"

The bits of "hard-tack" cracker which rewarded him were received with a mosaic of squalls and syllables which did him credit, only that some of them sounded as if his education had been begun on shipboard.

It was a sort of family picnic, under very favorable conditions. By the time all the animals were attended to and even the voice of Jemima ceased to plead, the smell of coffee boiling and bacon frying arose and floated off among the trees to the nose of every human being there. It told of a noonday meal very quickly prepared, but the cat had beaten Mrs. Munro. Away in the edge of the grove he had found and slain an infant rabbit and was already eating his dinner.

There was a very merry picnic there, noisy with talk about land and neighbors and good times to come, but there was an altogether different gathering little more than half a mile away.

The polite horseman who had so fully answered all their inquiries about Chumley and the region around about was still in the saddle, and so were three Pawnees who were listening to what he had to say. He was giving them a very accurate account of the Munro outfit and its immediate destination, and when he had finished it a dusky barbarian nodded his head and replied,—

"Ugh! Good. No take 'em now. By and by no lookout. Dog die. Get all horse then."

That this was the general opinion of the future fate of a part at least of the Munro quadruped property was signified by a chorus of grunts. The four rode along in company, and the red men had no means of guessing the nature of that part of the

treasure which Jerry McCord-Payne had not reported to them. He said to himself concerning it,—

"Her mother called her Jessie. She is as beautiful as Erica. The most perfect pair of opposites that could be made. A fellow could not be in love with two blondes at the same time, but a blonde and a brunette, that's different. I can call and see Jessie again at any time, but I suppose I must look out for Chumley. His time is coming. He is the only man in all this tract of country that can spot me. That's enough to settle his fate for him."

CHAPTER XII.

CHUMLEY'S POST.

Not many miles beyond the grove in which the Munro family were taking their noonday meal, the Pawnee Trail came to a spot where there was little to tempt anybody to stand still. On the summit of a gentle knoll, a little to the left of the Trail, stood about twenty feet of what had once been the trunk of a young hickory-tree. It seemed a sort of landmark, and at the base of it there was a very curious collection of antiquities. Somebody had taken the pains to make that post uncanny. That

person or persons had brought a lot of old, weather-whitened buffalo skulls and skulls of horses and other animals such as every old prairie road abounds with, and had heaped them around the foot of the hickory. Among these, without any human help whatever, flying seeds had fallen and rooted and grown, until now a mass of briers and thistles had risen to prosperity, with the old horns and bones peeping out here and there among them.

To the right, the unbroken prairie swept away for half a mile in green rolls, to the borders of a line of timber, with hilly and broken-looking land beyond it. To the left, there was forest within a quarter of a mile. Nearer than that, however, there were fences and growing corn, and over these arose the roof and chimney of a human dwelling.

Right past the queer landmark the Pawnee Trail went on in nearly a bee-line until it lost itself among the trees, but before it did that it came to a man. He was well but roughly dressed; a strongly-built fellow of about twenty-five or, it might be, a little more. His face was deeply marked, and just now it was decidedly cloudy. It was crowned by crisp, brown hair, and his steel-gray eyes looked out under jutting brows. His shortly-trimmed beard and moustaches did not conceal the iron determination expressed by his mouth. In fact, his jaws and lips had set themselves together with a firmness which suggested the idea that it would

require an effort for him to get them apart wide enough for his next speaking or eating.

Such an effort he now made, and as he did so, he half affectionately patted the butt of a silver-mounted repeating rifle, the barrel of which lay in the crook of his left arm. His eyes were glancing, with a glitter in them, along the Trail towards the prairie. A party of men was coming from that direction, and had reduced the speed of their horses from a gallop to a walk as soon as they came in sight of him. If they were consulting as to any course of action they might be about to take, so was he.

"Four of you," he said, aloud, "and the glass told me who you were. I'll stand still and see if I can't find out something more."

Not a step did he move as they drew nearer, and they did not hear him say to himself,—

"Jerry McCord and three of his Pawnees."

Every redskin of them nodded his head and said "How" as he went by, and the handsome white man in the blue suit lifted his Panama with mocking courtesy of manner, but the stern man on foot did not move a muscle or utter a sound. His glittering gray eyes looked full into the face of Jerry McCord, while his own features grew gray rather than red. They expressed an intensity of feeling which could hardly be accounted for by the loss of live-stock, irritating as that may be, and yet

the first words uttered, after the four riders went by, were,—

"It's a fact. Jerry McCord and Mortimer Herries are the same man. That isn't all. I know now who it was that lay in wait for Erica. He'd have killed me dead on the spot if he had dared, for he now knows that I know him. I think he will come this way once too often."

He paused a moment, and then he suddenly exclaimed,—

"Erica? What have I to do with her? What is she to me? What am I to her? No! A thousand times no. I shall never again care for a woman, but I could not leave Erica at the mercy of such a miscreant as Jerry McCord. I'll protect her as if she were my own sister. I hated the idea of having near neighbors until this very hour, but I'm glad of it now. Women coming as well as men, and it's better for her,—better for me. I'll sell out and run away as soon as I can after things are safe."

He was evidently excited about something, and his glances after the retreating horsemen followed them till they disappeared under the trees.

A quick ear could have detected curious modulations and intonations in the deep voice. There was a sort of music here and there, and something of exactness in pronunciation not common among prairie settlers. The moment Jerry and his Paw-

nees were out of sight, he turned and walked rapidly away towards the house, with a springy, elastic step which spoke well for his health and for the generally good condition of his muscles.

Had his eyes been even more piercing than they seemed, they could not have told him what was going on beyond the line of forest. The four men who had ridden past him were halted among the shadows and were discussing both him and the best way of dealing with him.

The faces of the three Pawnees were all uncommonly bad, but not one among them seemed at that moment to express so much evil as did that of their white associate and leader. Every line and wrinkle of it had deepened and every vein and corrugation stood out, under the pressure of the strong wickedness within him, in a manner which made the reading of it as plain as print. He spoke rapidly and stormily, and when he had finished there was silence for a moment. Then one of the Pawnees pointed back along the Trail and said,—

"Ugh! know Chumley. Shoot quick, straight. No touch him now. Kill him behind tree, some day. Wait. Day come, sure."

"Ugh!" went around from lip to lip of the trio, with words which indicated that Chumley had somehow acquired a name for skill and promptness in the use of weapons.

Jerry's turn to speak again came to him.

"You are right about it. No hurry. But we will fetch Chumley yet," he said, with a freezing smile. "What you and I want is horses. We can wait till the new settlers are all there. No use in doing anything that will put them on their guard."

"Chumley do that," said an Indian.

"Maybe not. Maybe they won't believe him in a hurry. It's a good while since we've done any business near here. You ride on now, and I'll take a scout around. I want to see that outfit go into camp."

"Ugh!" went the rounds, but other comments were few and brief, and the Pawnees rode onward, leaving Jerry McCord alone to take his further observations and develop more perfectly such plans as his love of other men's horses and the divided nature of his admiration for women might require. He at once rode in among the trees and dismounted.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RED BEAUTY.

The gathering under the oaks by the spring was entirely a family party. Even the parrot gained extra crumbs, while watching the other eaters, by loudly announcing himself as "Polly Munro," while Bob Munro, out on the prairie, was now and then compelled to transfer his bone from place to place as his cows and oxen fed away from him.

It was plain that a large amount of enthusiasm was kindling over the fact that their new "land" was so near them. Judging from all that they had seen, it must be good land, and it had been painted to them as a square mile of Eden.

They were hastily finishing their meal, with an avowed opinion that the horses and cattle had eaten and rested sufficiently to last until the journey's end should be reached, when they were startled by the sound of a human voice. All it said was the one word,—

"How!"

"I declare!" exclaimed Mrs. Munro. "It's an Indian! Where did he come from?"

Every head had turned instantly, as if pulled by the same wire, and all saw that she was correct. Be-

tween the front wheel and the tongue of the nearest wagon,—the parrot's,—and much as if he had just arisen from crawling under it, stood the most undelightful-looking person they had ever seen. Tangled gray hair streamed down around a dark face of hideous ugliness, in the centre of which an enormous nose projected above a wide mouth. A red and black checked calico shirt was supplemented by two pairs of white man's trousers, a leg from each, one of army blue and one of greasy yellow. Pistol and knife in belt and a rifle in his left hand, with an evident assumption of vagabond dignity, the stranger held out his right hand palm upward, and again said "How."

Red warrior as he was, his first reply seemed so nearly in his left ear that he turned his head for another piercing squawk from Poll, and this was followed by,—

"Pawnee! Pawnee! Me-a-ow!"

"Devil! Ugh!" exclaimed the astonished intruder; but Poll knew that word also very well, and sent it back at him:

"Devil! Hip! Pawnee! Devil! Polly Munro, —hurrah!"

"No Pawnee. Potawatamy." But at that point the red man recovered his equilibrium and turned towards Perry Munro, who had sprung to his feet instantly and was now advancing. The others also arose and came, but Perry was the first to say

"How" and offer his hand. Uncle John did not stir until he had informed himself audibly,—

"It is our best policy to cultivate friendly relations with the savages."

At that moment Perry and the rest were obtaining the information:

"Red Beauty great chief. No Pawnee. Potawatamy. Friend. Want eat. Want smoke. Very handsome brave."

Poll turned a complete somersault on his swing, as if he knew what it was that set Jessie's eyes dancing when she heard that, but Perry kept his face and said,—

"All right. Come and have a cup of coffee and a pipe. Mother, fry him a slice of bacon, please. He's just the man."

"Glad he come? How know? Bad Indian. Kill a heap. 'Teal a horse. 'Teal young squaw. Kill devil in wagon, call him Pawnee."

"He's an original!" exclaimed Mr. Munro. "John, he's a character. It almost looks as if there was fun in him."

"I am always interested in types and specimens of humanity," responded Uncle John, "but I never before saw such a bilious-looking face."

"Devil! Hurrah!" came from the cage in the wagon, but the Red Beauty gravely seated himself near the fire and waited for his rasher of bacon, while Perry and Mr. Munro, and even Mrs. Munro,

after a little, plied him with questions. He answered with a voluble use of English which told of much dealing with pale-faces, but he appeared inclined to take gloomy views of the world he lived in and of the people he knew.

"Is it a good country?" asked Perry.

"Ugh! Bad land. Grass all dry up, pretty soon. Grasshopper come. Big snow."

"Is it healthy to live in?"

"All shake. Cow die. Young squaw turn yellow. Old squaw lose teeth."

"Are there many settlers?" asked Mrs. Munro.

"No pale-face. Some come, a day. Bad w'ite man. 'Teal. Lie. Go drunk. Pawnee all around for 'calp. Burn house."

A smothered squeal and grunt from Jemima's wagon caught his quick ears, and he was on his feet in a second. Not another word did he speak until he had been for a look at her and her family. He returned to say,—

"Ugh! Pawnee 'teal 'em all."

"Do you know a man named Chumley?" asked Mr. Munro.

"Ugh! Know him. Yellow-heads go to him now. Kill 'em all and take mule. Bad man. Red Beauty there a day."

"Is he so bad as that?" asked Mrs. Munro, in some dismay.

"Bad man. Run away with young squaw. Take

old squaw with him. Kill 'em both. Come back and say, lost 'em."

"You are right," said Uncle John, positively. "The man is a character. I don't believe all the medicines in my box would cure him of lying. Keep him a going, Perry. You may learn something."

The bacon was ready, and from the minute of its offering until it was gone the Red Beauty had no words to throw away, even when Polly again called him a devil and a Pawnee.

Perry and his father went off to gather and water and yoke the oxen, and Jessie saddled her own horse and her mother's. Red Beauty took note of everything that went on, but he made no comment until Bob came in from guarding the cattle and walked up to smell of him.

"Big dog, ugh!" he remarked. "Snow come, kill him then. Good eat. Better than fat hog. Red Beauty want to be there when squaw cook dog. Eat a heap!"

Peals of laughter answered him, but Bob had made his investigation and he now gravely held up a paw. The Indian as gravely took it, but the expression of his face changed.

"Dog know heap," he said, gruffly. "Red Beauty good Indian all time now. Not lie any more. Talk straight. Go get pony. Ride along. Tell about Pawnee."

He walked away quickly, accompanied somewhat watchfully by Bob, and returned in a few moments upon the blanketed but unsaddled back of a serviceable-looking mustang. He had evidently hidden him at the western edge of the grove that he might creep in undiscovered.

While he was gone for the pony it had been thoughtfully remarked by Jessie,—

"Mother, that's what we've read about. He came in like a snake. He might have killed us all."

"Bob was away, my dear, and the rest of us are not good watch-dogs, especially in the daytime."

"Anyhow, they said all the Indians were gone away and the country was peaceable, and now this old Indian tells us——"

"Tells us lies, Jessie," said Uncle John, peering into her face through the blue goggles with which he had replaced his green ones. "The old fellow is a character. He can lie as fast as a horse can trot. The agent told us there were no bad neighbors."

It was not long, now, before they were all on the trail again, and for once the ox-teams had drivers who seemed inclined to push them. The train had just one more odd feature, for the Red Beauty seemed disposed to linger in the rear and devote himself to the two white squaws. He declared himself bound to tell them the truth, as he had become their "friend." No doubt he made an effort, but if all that he told them was true, especially about

himself, Jessie's remark to him was only a faint expression:

"You are the most wonderful Indian I ever met."

"Great white chief at fort gave name. Said Red Beauty to him. Handsome brave. Had nine squaw."

"What became of them?" asked Mrs. Munro, unwisely.

"Some die. Some run away. Trade some for pony. Only got two now. Buy another some day. How much take for her?"

Jessie gave her horse a sudden fillip and dashed away towards the front, bowing her face to his very mane in crimsoned merriment and disgust over her first direct "proposal," but Mrs. Munro replied,—

"Hundred ponies, big wagon, much pig, blanket——"

"Ugh! So. Cost a heap. Red Beauty want a one-pony squaw."

"I guess so," said Jessie's mother, but her father and brother and uncle heard the story quickly and the fun of it lasted for a full mile.

The distant line of forest drew nearer, and still the green undulations of the grassy plain promised fertile farming land, and the groves and clumps of bushes occurred more frequently. At last the wind from the west brought back a great shout from Perry, who had ridden ahead, and then they could distinguish the words which eagerly followed it:

"Chumley's Post! Here we are!"

The cattle had to pull now, and the Red Beauty galloped on to the landmark reached by Perry, followed by Jessie and her mother. Bob was there already, pawing among the old bones as if he meant to discover why all the human members of his family should stare so at that lonely stick of hickory.

It marked, as the Munros had been informed, the corner of Mr. Chumley's land. The Pawnee Trail followed the dividing line pretty nearly, and all the prairie to the right, as they stood, was their own.

"I am satisfied," said Uncle John. "I knew from the face of that agent that he was telling me the truth."

"I must say," remarked Mrs. Munro, "that for this once you may have been right. There is a great load off my mind."

She had drawn a very long breath and she felt better, visibly, but at that moment a voice from the wagon behind her shouted,—

"Pawnee! Devil! Polly Munro! Hurrah! Me-a-ow! Pawnee!"

"Off to the right, father," said Perry, excitedly. "You follow with the teams and I'll gallop ahead and pick out a spot to camp on."

"Wait a moment, Perry," exclaimed his mother. "Somebody's coming. That must be Chumley's house."

"Him come," said the Red Beauty.

So it was, but he did not come on any pony. Not a horse owned by the Munro family could compare with the splendid thoroughbred which came bounding towards them bearing a horseman whose very seat in the saddle was something pleasant to look at.

"He rides well," said Jessie, but her brother replied,—

"Don't I wish I owned that horse, though! If there were really any Indians around here, they'd have stolen him long ago."

Perhaps, but now he brought his rider close to them, and again they had a small surprise.

"Sir," said he to Perry, who was nearest, "and ladies, Mr. Richard Chumley. I did not get the name of my new neighbors."

He said it with so graceful a bow that the same thought flashed into every mind in the circle:

"Why! He's a gentleman!"

Even Bob understood it perfectly, being a gentleman dog himself, but Poll squawked fearfully and said "devil."

Perry was hardly as polished as the new arrival, but he did fairly well.

"My father, Mr. Munro. My uncle, Mr. John Munro. My mother, Mr. Chumley,—my sister. I am Perry Munro."

A second low bow went to the ladies, but the muttered words on the iron lips were not audible.

They were curiously made up of,—

"What a splendid girl! Magnificent mastiff! Old red vagabond!"

Before his head was lifted, the mouth belonging to the only pair of eyes which had read his flashing glance added,—

"Bad man, Chumley. Kill a heap. 'Teal a horse. Eat dog."

Not a muscle of Chumley's face lost its composure, and he spoke now to Mr. Munro.

"I'm glad you came through all right. I know every inch of the land you've bought. If you will let me, I'll pilot you to the best spot on it for a homestead. High ground, trees, and running water."

"Much obliged to you. Just the favor I was wishing for," said Mr. Munro, and his wife exclaimed,—

"I'm so glad! Thank you ever so much, Mr. Chumley."

"Keep eye on him," growled the Red Beauty. "'Calp squaw. No pig left pretty soon. All gone to Chumley kettle."

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THEIR OWN LAND.

At the hour when Red Beauty came out from under the wagon in the Munro camp, there were two squads of United States cavalry very hard at work. That is, they were travelling vigorously in search of Jerry McCord and his vagabond Pawnees. Each squad was attended by scouts of high reputation and by trained redskin trailers, whose ability to excel any bloodhound in following human game was beyond dispute. Each commanding officer had excellent reasons for believing himself upon the right track, and yet they were more than two hundred miles apart. They could not both be close behind the same man, for the captain was going south and the lieutenant was riding northeasterly, and was the more confident of the two that he was about to collar those Pawnees and lead them back to the reservation to study farming.

"I'd follow them to the North Pole," said the lieutenant, zealously.

"I'd search the Pawnee Trail for him from end to end," remarked the captain, "if I only knew he was on it."

Neither of those energetic public servants was to be any wiser that day. They did such an amount of searching, nevertheless, that they were compelled to pull up and go into camp at an early hour, if only to be sure of having horses under them next day.

During all that time the objects of their search were attending to their own affairs, in ignorance that any special messenger was coming after them. Their dashing leader had been to all outward seeming a peaceful and unarmed man when he was Mr. Payne and was talking with Jessie and her mother. At that time one of the Pawnee quartette, away on the prairie, had been carrying two rifles. Now that man had but one, and Jerry himself was once more a rifleman.

That region was rich in game of many kinds, and it was no wonder at all that the four red men who rode westward should stir a buck from his covert and send him dashing away from a hasty shot which did not hit him. It was an every-day occurrence of any hunter's life that the same buck should continue his frightened race until he came out among the trees where Jerry McCord had hitched his horse and stood by him taking inward counsel as to his next best thing to do.

The buck stopped suddenly after the foolish manner of startled deer, and Jerry's ready rifle was at his shoulder in a twinkling. A flash, a

report, a great bound, and as the buck came down among the twigs and leaves, a new idea came brightly into the mind of Jerry McCord.

"I can tell them a good enough story. At all events I won't miss a good chance to see her again. I'd like to have a talk with Erica. Jessie must have seen that I am no common man, but I had to keep my coat buttoned."

That was a fact only mournful because in concealing knife and pistol a gorgeous gold chain suggesting the elegant watch at the end of it was also hidden. Personal vanity had sacrificed something to prudence, but it was desirable that the beautiful brunette he admired should understand him as belonging to the high kind of men who wear gold watches.

Jerry lifted the buck upon his horse and led him away to a hiding and hitching place, nearer the edge of the forest, but in a direction well away from Chumley's line. After that the course of events on the open prairie had an observer.

There was much going on there. The sun was nearly two hours high when Chumley led the Munro train away from the Pawnee Trail and across their own land. He seemed to be leading them in the direction of an outreaching curve of the line of trees. Perry and his father were disposed to give their entire time and industry to the ox-teams, but Uncle John and Mrs. Munro and

Jessie rode ahead with their neighbor and guide. At a little distance behind them rode the Red Beauty, and now and then his lips opened in curious comments upon the existing state of affairs. So did the hooked beak of Polly Munro, who seemed, for some reason, to be in a state of excite ment if not of wrath.

Away in advance of all the train and of its guide, with increasing rapidity of trot or canter, went the great mastiff. How the animal creation gets its impressions has been a matter of deep study with many acute men. Get them they do, and all the acute men have declared themselves finally puzzled as to the methods. The oxen had tugged the wagons only half a mile before Perry Munro and his father saw Chumley suddenly raise his hand and point at something ahead of him. They could not hear him say,—

"There, Mrs. Munro, do you see that dog? He is waiting for you on the very spot where I believe you will decide to build your house."

"How came he to select it?" exclaimed Jessie.

"It selects itself," said Chumley. "The brook is just beyond that knoll, and there are trees enough for shade. There's open ground between that and the woods, and that's worth something."

"How so?" asked Mrs. Munro.

"It's of less consequence now than it used to be, but when I built my house I took good care there

should not be anything very close to it that an Indian could creep up under cover of. You'll have two hundred yards of open."

"I thought you said that they were not dangerous any more," said Jessie.

"They are not. White men like Jerry McCord are more dangerous than any Indians."

"Who is he?" asked Mrs. Munro.

"A gentleman who is quite likely to call and see you. You must tell me what you think of him after he has done so. I would not say a word about him, but you do not seem to have any horses to spare. I shall kill him some day, if he and his Pawnees do not kill me first."

Jessie looked wonderingly into the chilled-iron calmness of his face as he said that, and all the smile faded out of her own. She saw and felt that he thoroughly meant what he said. He intended and expected to kill Jerry McCord, whoever he might be, and had no emotion whatsoever concerning the matter. It was a new revelation to a young girl from a quiet Eastern village, and it was almost as much so to Mrs. Munro.

Instantly there flashed upon their memories the remarks made by the dashing Mr. Payne as to the history and personal character of their mysterious neighbor. They had thought of them when he met the train, but his kindly heartiness had put them away until now.

This man, who spoke so calmly of a feud between himself and other men, was precisely as he had been represented. Mr. Payne had told the truth, and Chumley was a bad man to quarrel with. Where did he come from? How did he make his money, and why was his wife not living with him? Mr. Payne had said of all those important questions that as for himself he did not know.

"Woof-oof-oof!" came the deep musical summons of the mastiff from the site for the new homestead, and in a few minutes more the four wagons were wheeled into place. The oxen were turned loose, the horses were picketed, and then, for the first time, as it seemed, the men and women found voices and words to express themselves. They had reached their journey's end. They were about to begin a new life in a new home, and there had been something silent and wonderful about it all. Even the parrot was now quiet and looked about him anxiously, but the cat sprang down and began to investigate the surroundings.

The trees were grand old oaks and maples, and from them the land sloped gently to the border of the narrow, deep-running brook, full of trout, as Chumley said, and there was little left for a settler to ask for.

"Mother," suddenly exclaimed Jessie, "let's get out the pails and milk the cows. I shall almost feel at home when we've done that."

"So shall I," said her mother. "Perry, how about Jemima and her family? There's no use in keeping them in the wagon, is there?"

"Not a bit, I declare! Just hear her squeal! Come on, father."

"I'll help," said Chumley.

"So will I," said Uncle John. "That sow is a character. She has peculiarities that distinguish her. I am fond of the study of animals."

It was easy to pick up the little pigs and land them safely on the grass, but the removal of Jemima was an undertaking. She felt that it was so, and expressed herself strongly as her feet were tripped from under her. Yet more eloquent was she when she found herself dragged to and sliding down upon an inclined plane of boards. At the bottom of it she lay for half a minute and grunted her doubt as to whether she were really upon the earth, but a glimpse of her pigs in the grass aroused her and she got up to follow them.

"They'll be a fortune to you some day," said Chumley. "No transportation for pork now. Not till the railways come nearer. I've done nothing with it."

"Have you cattle?" said Mr. Munro.

"I sold all but a few last winter. I had then some idea of changing my location——" he paused and suddenly changed the subject. "I'll say one thing more, Mr. Munro. Eagleson, the Swede that

lives with me, is a very good carpenter. He owns the quarter-section east of mine, but isn't working it now. He's a capital hand with an axe. You'd better trade work with him. We'll come over and help you get out your logs and put up your house. Then you can help him with his, for he's about ready. Hands are scarce."

"Done!" said Mr. Munro. "Glad to do it," but Uncle John pointed at one of the wagons and remarked,—

"Chumley, do you see that? Something better than a log house."

It was a wide wagon, whose axles were farther apart than usual, fore and aft, and whose tilt was loftier.

"How so?" asked Chumley.

"There's a house in it, all ready to put up. Doors, windows, roof, everything. It's a patent."

"Kind of shell," said Chumley. "I've heard of 'em. They're first rate till there comes a wind."

"What then?" said Uncle John.

"What then? Why, if it's a wind such as we have here sometimes, there goes your house."

"Fifteen feet by twelve," said Uncle John, persistently, "and a perfect house for the size of it, but of course there will have to be a strong underpinning. We can put it up in one day, if we all take hold."

"Something in that," said Chumley; "but give

me logs. Will you come over to my house to supper?"

That was addressed to Mrs. Munro, and she hesitated a little before she replied,—

"Thank you, Mr. Chumley, but I am all in a fever. We've everything to look out for. We'd better put up our tents and take supper here."

"That's so, mother," said Perry. "Why, Mr. Chumley, I don't want any sleep to-night. I just want to unload. The lumber must be out of that wagon."

Chumley bowed politely, but his iron mouth did not smile. He said,—

"All right. Then I'll ride home, but we'll all be over in the morning."

He added a sharp, peculiar whistle, and his horse, which had for some minutes been wandering around loose, making acquaintance with the Munro horses and with Bob, came obediently up to be mounted. His rider sprang into the saddle amid a rain of acknowledgments of his kindness and good judgment in selecting that spot for his new neighbors, but he rode away without any more remarks. Hardly was he out of hearing before Uncle John took off his hat and said, as if addressing the entire party,—

"Now, that man is a character. There is something about him very unusual. You can see it in his face, and I'm glad we are to have him for a neighbor. Just look at that cat!"

It was only a change of subject from one remarkable person to another, for Tom had captured a very young prairie-chicken and was returning to camp with his game. There was enough of fresh meat on that bird for his own supper, and his human associates were to be provided in a most unlooked-for way.

The Red Beauty had been a silent Indian from the moment when the wagons halted. He had dismounted from his pony and had fastened him to a wheel, and then it was as if he had undertaken to stare through the canvas tilts, one after another. The wagon with the house in it was open at both ends, and its contents had fascination in them. Of all the loads ever brought by any train of immigrants, that was the most mysterious to the eyes of the old Potawatamy. Never before had he seen a patent house, packed up for transportation, and his lingering around it had peculiar consequences.

Chumley disappeared beyond the rolls of the prairie. Mrs. Munro was busy around her fire and Jessie with her milk-pails, while even Uncle John pulled Jemima's trough out of the wagon and carried it carefully to the place where she was rooting. She had not had her nose in the earth for days and days, and she worked as if determined to know what was hidden under all that grass.

"Father," said Perry, suddenly, "look yonder. Somebody's coming."

"I declare! It's Payne. How did he get so close in on us without being seen by anybody?"

The coming man had been seen, but not by any member of the Munro family. For some reason or other, Red Beauty had been for several minutes entirely hidden behind the wagon which contained the object of his curiosity.

"It is Mr. Payne," said Jessie in her turn, and she had more than one echo. He carried before him upon his horse the carcass of the buck which had come to him to be shot.

Under cover of the trees he had watched the arrival of the "outfit," and the departure of Chumley had removed any obstacle there might be in the way of his accepting the invitation given him to call.

Red Beauty cowered yet more closely behind the wagon as the now smiling adventurer rode in, and he listened gravely to every word of the salutations exchanged and the explanations given.

Payne had met a couple of his neighbors who were hunting among those hills. It was his intention to camp with them that very night, instead of pushing on homeward. They were in no need of the buck he had chanced to kill, and its only chance for being eaten was with and by the Munro family. Nothing could exceed the frank, free-hearted neighborly kindness with which he pressed upon them the gift he had ridden back to bring.

Mrs. Munro, in accepting it with thanks, was compelled to receive the bearer to an apparently better acquaintance, and it looked as if Jerry McCord were progressing finely.

Jessie was admiring the general appearance of the buck as it lay upon the grass, and Perry was talking about game with the man who brought it, when a croaking voice at the elbow of the latter astonished him with,—

"How! Red Beauty good friend."

Jessie Munro had glanced at the stranger's face at that moment, and Uncle John and her brother had been looking straight at him. They all saw a remarkable expression shoot swiftly across it. Something it was of a surprised and startled whiteness, and yet demon-like, that was followed by a forced and very imperfect smile.

"How!" he said. "You here?"

"Good Indian. Love Payne. Know Payne very well. Good man. Give Red Beauty a dollar."

With a laugh that rang somewhat hollow, the handsome hunter pulled some pieces of silver from his pocket and handed them to the queer collector, who at once added,—

"Chumley gone home now. Come back right away. Chumley love Payne. Give him big present first time see him. Chumley got two young squaw now. Give one to Payne."

He pointed at Jessie as he spoke, and the expres-

sion of her face did not indicate that she loved the Red Beauty.

"I shall have to decline your hospitality, Mrs. Munro," said Payne, turning towards his horse. "It won't do for me to lose myself in the woods in the dark. The Red Beauty is an acquaintance of mine."

"He is a character," interjected Uncle John. "I am deeply interested in him."

"Good Indian," said the character. "See Chumley when he come. Tell him Payne been here to see young squaw. Think she like him."

"I hope she will," laughed Payne. "Never mind his tongue, Miss Munro. Nobody can stop him. I hope to see you all again some day, but it's time for me to be off. Red Beauty, ride with me as far as the woods. I'll give you something."

"Red Beauty good company. Want another dollar. Good Indian. Never lie. Go right along."

So he did, and the two were hardly out of hearing before Uncle John drew a long breath and said,—

"I am very much mistaken if Mr. Payne himself is not a character. His face is remarkable."

It was just about then that the Red Beauty turned on his pony to say to his companion,—

"How Pawnee? All right?"

"All safe. You take care of your mouth when you go back, if you know what's good for yourself."

"Red Beauty good Indian. Know a heap. Lie straight for white Pawnee. Look out Chumley. Shoot quick. Bound to kill Jerry McCord."

"He may—Well, I won't say anything just now. You look out for yourself, that's all."

He spurred his horse to a gallop and disappeared among the trees along the trail, but it was evident that Chumley's declaration of intention concerning him had reached the ears of the old Indian. He was silent for a moment, and then remarked, as if to the vanished leader of the loose Pawnees,—

"Ugh! Red Beauty know heap. Know Jerry. Know Pawnee. Blue-coat come for 'em some day. Jerry better keep away from Chumley. Put him in a hole and cover him up. White Pawnee! Ugh!"

There was deep disgust in that last ejaculation.

CHAPTER XV.

A BUSY EVENING.

THERE were three entirely distinct sets of very busy minds that evening within short walking distance of Chumley's Post.

The first set included the entire Munro family. They had venison for supper, thanks to their new friend, and Red Beauty came back to get a share of it. He ate remarkably for a human being of his size, and he ate in dignified silence until Perry Munro asked him, twice,—

"What sort of a fellow is this man Payne? You seem to know him."

"Payne very good man. Pray a heap. Preach some. Give Red Beauty dollar. Say young squaw handsome. Say he come back 'teal her some day. Say boy green. Know more when learn something."

The laugh was a little against Perry this time, but he persisted:

"Where did you meet him before?"

"Boy ask too many question. Red Beauty not know so much as that. Good old Indian. Great chief. No tell lie. Sure lie if talk."

"I guess he's right there," said Mrs. Munro. "I don't believe we've heard him speak the truth yet."

"Just so," said Uncle John. "I don't believe he can. He is a character, and I'm interested in him."

They gave up questioning the old Indian, but the supper was finished rapidly. One "army tent" was already up, and another quickly followed. The moment the last peg was driven, Uncle John came back from Poll's wagon shouting,—

"Hold on a moment."

"What is it?" asked Perry.

"Here! Before you do anything else. The first thing to be done on settling in a new country like this is to take a dose of quinine. Five pills of two grains each will do. Say ten grains, or twelve. You'd better take blue pill with it, and a tablespoonful of McQuinzy's Blood Restorer and——"

"Not a pill for me," said Perry, with energy. "You may eat them all."

"I do not need them," said Uncle John. "I have been doctoring myself faithfully all the way. You'll all be sorry if you do not take precautions."

"Red Beauty take 'em. Drink anything got. Good Indian."

He was the only mortal in that camp with whom Uncle John succeeded, and even he held back until the precise dose he wanted was measured out.

The eager "doctor" remarked, as he did so,—

"I am a temperance man, and it's against the law to give whiskey to Indians; but in a case like this and as a medical prescription——"

He stopped there, and neither he nor anybody else knew precisely what went down the old Potawatamy's hardened throat with that glass of liquor. The rest of the party paused a moment to see it done, and Perry remarked,—

"Jessie, I think that knoll yonder by the brook would be a good place."

"For the house? Oh, no! Right in there among the trees——"

"No, not for the house. I mean a place to bury the old Indian. Uncle John's got him."

So it seemed, but there was a mistake somewhere. Uncle John had seen the Red Beauty swallow, with sincerity and simplicity, and yet, not many minutes later, the dosed savage was holding out to Bob a hand with many pills on its palm.

"Take 'em. No kill dog. Make him feel good."

The mastiff held out his great paw in a way that scattered the pills in the grass, but turned away his head as he did so.

"Dog know. Red Beauty safe, anyhow. Got whiskey."

The liquid medicines he had actually swallowed, whatever they might be, but he had escaped the quinine and mercury and iron and the like with the sleight of hand of a conjurer.

Two hours of toiling at the wagons followed, and the grass was strewn with lumber and other matters, but Mrs. Munro declared that it was time to get some sleep. It was settled that Perry should sit up and watch for the first half of the night, although Bob's presence seemed to render it needless, and the rest were soon under cover of the tents. The Red Beauty curled up on his blanket at some distance from the camp-fire, where Perry, with a rifle across his lap, sat still and dreamed waking dreams of the future before him in that part of the "Far West" land of American promise. Before doing so he had made a careful round of the camp and the cattle, and he meant to make another in due season, but his dreams got the better of him. He saw, as he went on among them, a stately mansion arise among those trees, with a stone bridge over the brook and a telescope mounted on the roof, and the entire section under cultivation, and a herd of prize cattle, and a new town only a few miles away. He was just beginning to think of the speeches he would make when the time should come for him to run as a candidate for Congress, when he was called back to the present time and the bare prairie by a warning growl from his faithful Bob. He sprang to his feet, rifle in hand, but Bob was away in the dark there somewhere, calling for him with yet another growl.

"Something's up!" he exclaimed, as he hurried forward, and so it was.

The Red Beauty was up and was standing still, about ten feet from his own pony, with Bob posted between the two, as if he did not propose to let that redskin leave the camp unceremoniously.

"What's the matter?" asked Perry.

"Woof-oof-oof," said Bob.

"Want pony," said the Red Beauty. "Dog devil. Say no! Ugh!"

"Take your pony, if you're going," said Perry. "Be still, Bob. What's your hurry?"

"Medicine feel bad. Good Indian, Red Beauty. No take any more. Boy keep dog?"

"He won't hurt you, now I'm here. Shake hands. Friend?"

"Good friend," said the old vagabond, offering his hand. "Boy hold tongue if know something? Shut mouth?"

"Never say a word," said Perry.

"When Payne come again, boy say to him 'Payne!' When boy think of him, think 'Jerry McCord 'teal horse.' He shoot Red Beauty for say that. Bad man, White Pawnee. Take 'calp."

There was an intensity of meaning in the old Indian's face that almost convinced Perry he was telling the truth. At all events he saw no reason why his red visitor should not mount his own pony and ride away. Bob felt differently about it. Red

Beauty was wrapped in his blanket, and evidently meant to ride barebacked, without strapping it in its usual place as a saddle. Bob was yet closer to him as he now stepped forward, and made a sudden rush, just as the great and good and truthful Potawatamy lifted the hand that held his rifle and took in the other the bridle, ready to mount.

Red Beauty was instantly on the back of his pony, but Bob held in his mouth the folded ends of a blanket which had travelled for many days with the Munro wagons.

"Ugh! Where dog get blanket?"

"Never mind," said Perry. "I rather expected you'd try to steal something. Come again, any time. Bob and I'll watch you."

"Good Indian," replied Red Beauty. "Dog 'teal blanket. Tell Medicine John for old chief, he come again. Eat pill. Whiskey make him sick."

The pony bore him away into the darkness, and Perry Munro felt that all the blankets in camp were safer. At all events there came no further disturbance until about sunrise the next morning.

All the minds there were less busy than they had been, but none of them guessed what had been working in that of the man to whom they were indebted for their venison supper.

Before parting from Red Beauty, Jerry McCord had heard whatever that worthy chose to tell him

of the Munro family and of their visit from Chumley. Much of it was reasonably near the truth, and the "White Pawnee" was plainly unaware of the old Potawatamy's real feeling towards himself and his associates. He was keenly aware, however, that a great and very sudden change had come over his own feelings in one important particular.

It is said that if a wolf is following one sheep and comes across the fresher trail of another, he will leave the first and follow the second. Up to the hour when Jerry joined the Munro train that day, he had believed himself madly in love with Erica Eagleson, and he now declared that such was still the case, and that he meant to risk all sorts of things for a chance to tell her so once more.

Now, however, and in spite of all his romantic passion for the singer who had charmed him in the forest, he suddenly drew his rein and halted on the Pawnee Trail to exclaim,—

"Jessie Munro? She is the most lovely being I ever saw! What glorious dark hair! What magnificent black eyes! If that old Potawatamy tells them any nonsense about me, I'll shoot the top of his head off."

His dark face was flushed and his eyes were dancing with fierce, vindictive flashes. He hurled hard words at Chumley and at all the world whose self-protecting ways interfered between him and the utter freedom of his miserable will. There

was no doubt but what, as Red Beauty might have expressed it, he was ready to "'teal" either or both of those remarkable young white squaws and run away with them. It was a case of "character" study for Uncle John, or rather it was a case of fickle selfishness every way worthy of a "White Pawnee."

It was too late for any more courting of any sort to be done that evening, and Jerry rode on westward, full of thought.

Chumley himself rode homeward from the Munro camp with an uncommonly busy mind. The horse under him was compelled to travel slowly, in spite of repeated lashings out and efforts at a dash forward. His rider curbed him with a strength and skill which had not been unnoticed by the new acquaintances he had just parted from. His face wore several times an expression of even savage determination.

"Kill him!" he said between his set teeth. "Well, he must keep away from Erica. Am I in love with her? No, but he shall not have her. With me? No, I'm not conceited enough for that. I hated all women, and yet here they are,—here I am. I cannot help myself, but what a remarkable resemblance it is. The same hair, eyes, features, alike in all but the expression. Ah, my lady, she's as beautiful as ever you were, and I don't believe she's as hollow-hearted. She's as fresh as a rose,

and she was never spoiled by society, confound it. Look here, my boy, what's got into you?"

The last inquiring remark of Chumley was addressed to his own inner man, but his horse seemed to believe himself spoken to. He threw up his heels with a sharp whinny, and his forward bound was unchecked. Very few minutes of that rate of speed were required to bring the rider to the gate of the enclosure which contained his house. The gate was shut, but there was no waiting for somebody to open it. Chumley's thoroughbred went over it without touching, and the feat was so well performed as to draw forth exclamations of admiration from three pairs of lips. It was worthy of note that the comments of Gustav Eagleson and his wife, though made with fair correctness, were marked with a strong accent, while the few words uttered by Erica were good, crisp English. Four years, even in that sort of frontier schooling, had done wonders for her.

If Chumley had been to any extent her instructor or not, she seemed to stand in some awe of him. She at once went back into the house and busied herself around a neat and well-set supper-table, carrying with her a peculiar air of trying not to sing and of doing many things mainly as a means of suppressing the exuberant music in her.

Chumley dismounted in front of the house, and his horse, like a dog, followed him around the cor-

ner of it to the right. A one-story structure of excellent log-work was that house, and it occupied three sides of a hollow square. In the middle front was the large room where Erica was smiling around the supper-table. To the left of this were two bedrooms, and back of them was a kitchen. To the right of it was another bedroom, and back of this the side of the square was lengthened unduly, for there were the stables of Chumley's horses.

They could all be locked up at night, and were under his own roof as important members of his family. A pair of setters and four very fine staghounds made up the list of members and added materially to the security of the other live-stock. Supper was ready by the time the master of the house came back from the stables, and he ate it with an excellent appetite, but all his efforts at cheerfulness and all the vivid description he gave of the Munro family failed to conceal the fact that he had something on his mind. The deep interest taken by the rest in their new neighbors did it for him, and Erica's assent to an early call on Jessie was eagerly given.

"I hope she will be company for you," said Chumley, "and I think you will like her mother."

"We shall like them very much," said Mrs. Eagleson, but Chumley had finished his supper and he at once disappeared through the door at the right. This, then, was his own room, and it had another

door on the stable side. Beyond a doubt it was the only room of its exact kind in all that region of country. Not more than twelve feet square, it was a bedroom, an arsenal, a library, a kind of fort, while the fiddle and the French horn hanging on the wall testified that it might also be a music-room. Rifles, fowling-pieces, pistols, hunting-knives, fishing-rods and tackle, testified to Chumley's sporting proclivities, and the small but well-stocked bookcase intimated that he could and did read. Erica may also have had the benefit of those books. There was one window, with a heavy outer shutter and one as heavy inside, and all the other rooms of that house were similarly well guarded. It was as if the country had been unsafe at some time, or that Chumley had enemies and meant to be ready for them if they should come to see him.

He was not thinking of them now, but entered the room with a moody, abstracted air, as if his mind were busy with persons and things at a distance. His hard mouth seemed to grow yet harder, and his chest heaved and fell with strong breathings. He stood still in the centre of the floor, staring out of the window for a moment, and then said to himself, hoarsely,—

"A man a fool. A woman a hollow-hearted cheat. A ruined life? Is it so? Here I am, and as I am instead of what I might have been. Here I must not stay, though, unless about long enough

to kill Jerry McCord and some of his Pawnees and make the place safe to live in. It isn't easy for me to look into that girl's face, but I must go over there again in the morning."

CHAPTER XVI.

WOLVES IN THEIR DEN.

The lieutenant commanding the squad of cavalry two hundred miles away northward went to sleep saying,—

"They're up hereaway somewhere."

The captain, only a day's march from the Pawnee Trail, at the same hour remarked to his orderly sergeant,—

"We must go slow to-morrow or we shall go by them somewhere."

The evening's occurrences at the Pawnee outlaw camp among the hills began early. Two more Indians rode in, and there were indications that these were not Pawnees, but renegades from some other tribe. At all events they were of the kind of Indians who cannot long be kept upon any "reservation" after the regular government annuities and presents have been distributed.

This pair of dusky vagabonds had a dangerous cargo strapped upon the back of a pony they were leading. The pony was one that his owner had missed three days before, and the pair of five-gallon kegs he carried had been filled in some manner unknown to the trader claiming the evil "barrel."

Ten gallons or so of "blue ruin," infernalism, crime. The liquid form in which the Enemy of men commonly appears nowadays, and it was very much as if he had come to his own when that whiskey was carried into Jerry McCord's camp.

It is not well to even try and imagine the wooden stupidities and other wretchednesses of a savage orgy, but this one had a peculiarity of its own. The stolen poison was dealt out with jealous fairness and regularity, without quarrelling, and only a mere trifle was given to any squaw. It was apparent that all those born and bred rascals were under a strong law and discipline of their own, and were trying to observe it rigidly.

There was one inevitable result, and that was the helplessness of the entire party before midnight. It was another consequence, just as inevitable, that any lurking, cowardly mischief in any evil bosom among them would either be laid asleep or aroused to insane activity. All but one went to sleep. Even the tall warrior whose turn it was to "stand guard" sat down for that purpose at the foot of a tree, and fell against it shortly. His slumbers were

as deep as those of any other victim of strong drink in that camp. There was but one brain among them all which had not been overcome, and even this one had lost all but a single, overwhelming, inherited passion and faculty. That is, there was one Pawnee whose inborn thirst for killing had not been drowned by the fire-water. This human wolf half-way awakened, with a dreamy determination to murder somebody, but without any definite hate or purpose against one more than another of his fellow-outlaws.

By the light of the smouldering fires he saw the drunken sentry slumbering against the tree. In an instant the wild beast within him had found an object, and he was crawling through the grass in the direction of the shadows behind that tree. Not another pair of eyes in camp was open when his dark, demoniac visage gleamed close to the earth at the side of the tree-trunk. Something was lifted that glittered as it rose. A dull, faint thud told of a knife driven to the very hilt. There was a gasping gurgle as the blade was withdrawn, but the dead sentry whose heart had been cloven never altered his position between the roots and against the trunk. The human wolf was satisfied, and crawled away without leaving a trace behind him, although it was quite likely that in the morning he might remember what he had done. All he said now was,—

"Ugh! One more. No take 'calp this time. Bull-Joe great chief."

Even vanity had something to do with his thirst for blood.

Jerry McCord must have loitered on the way, for it was an hour later before he entered the little valley. Dogs barked as he drew near, but no human being came to see who he might be or on what errand. He was surprised only until he had examined one prostrate form and exclaimed,—

"Where did they get it, I wonder?"

He turned his horse loose and made the rounds of the camp until he knew the full extent of the matter, and the last drunkard he took note of was the sentry at the tree. He had seen him before, indeed, for all around him had gathered nearly a dozen of such mongrel curs as infest such a community. They were watching him as if puzzled, or as if some remnant of their own original wolfishness had been stirred by such a presence.

Jerry McCord leaned forward and laid his hand upon the shoulder of the seemingly sleeping Indian, but he instantly withdrew it.

"Dead? Murdered? There has been a fight!"

Loud, shrill, angry, piercing, was the Pawnee war-whoop with which he startled that camp. No Indian among them could have done it better, and every soul with life enough left to hear sprang up or staggered up at once. That meant all the squaws

and four or five sodden, listless warriors, among whom was not the one who had slain the sentry. They came to stand around among the dogs and listen vaguely to Jerry's storm of wrathful questioning, and to grunt their own stupid and ignorant astonishment. Not one of them could tell how the thing had happened. Even the sober squaws declared it a mystery, but they sat up afterwards while the "braves" went off to sleep again, the latter muttering threats against somebody or other in the morning.

Jerry himself did not even sit down. He strode slowly back and forth among the shadows and the dull, dying fire-glows, as if he had something upon his mind.

All around him were the last and worst results of selfish savagery, even to the corpse at the tree. He was among them and of them, and he was a white man. Young, strong, handsome, intelligent, capable, a white Pawnee and a horse-thief. It would have been wonderful if there had not come to him at least one flashing imagination of two fair, innocent girl faces, looking at him scornfully, as at something unutterably beneath them.

Just a glimpse, perhaps, but it burnt him, and he clinched his hands desperately.

"I'll take Jessie Munro," he said, "and I'll get out of this. I've had enough of it. I'd better put one of the bucks on the trail of that old Pota-

watamy before his tongue does any harm. Chumley's time has come if he interferes. No more nonsense. Erica? I love her as much as ever. She is a beauty, but she'd not be so good a match as the Yankee girl. Nobody can prove anything against me. I'll get rid of all I've got out yonder, and that 'll give me enough for a start. Then I'll take Jessie and turn farmer. I'd like it, though, if these fellows would all kill each other and make an end of the gang. They've begun well."

The first faint light of dawn was climbing the easterly tree-tops when Jerry McCord's disgust with his associates came to help settle his determination. He confessed to himself that he had been often in love before, but never so tremendously as now. He also declared, in several other forms, that he was sick of his vagabond life and was quite sure of being able to hide its record, provided Chumley could be killed before he could come between him and the good opinion of the Munro family. He would only stay in that camp long enough to get breakfast, and he would then set out upon the prosecution of his new plans, courtship included. Strange to say, he actually considered all this as some sort of reformation. It was a little mixed with proposed deceit, lying, cheating, and murder, but he did not look into that part of his improved state of mind too closely.

At about the same hour of the morning Bob

Munro came and poked his great, kindly, lion-like head into the tent where Perry was lying, and a glance told him that his master was waking up. Mr. Munro lay sleeping soundly under the same canvas, but Bob's errand was not to him. He came to see if he could find some method of telling Perry that Jessie was already out of her tent, studying the situation, and that Uncle John, whose turn it was to play watchman, was acting that character with his eyes shut and his mouth open.

Perry could not understand the whine, but he was eager to be up and doing. He felt as if there was a new farm to be opened and a house to be built that very day. He did not disturb his father, but in half a minute he was out of the tent and far enough from it to see Jessie beckoning to him.

"Perry," she said, as he drew nearer, "do come and look at Uncle John."

That was not precisely what she meant. Uncle John was there, sure enough, on a blanket spread not far from the ashes of the fire, but he was not alone. There would have been nothing worth coming to see if he had been alone. Just beyond him, and so near that one of her hoofs all but touched him, lay a cow. At his feet had settled Jemima, with her children around her. The cat lay, purring, close against the arm he had thrown out. Take it altogether, they made a picture of mutual confidence and esteem, but Perry sarcastically remarked,—

"There's no danger in him now. All his pills are in his box."

Jemima may have heard, but certainly she saw, and her loud good-morning grunt disturbed both the cow and Uncle John. They awoke at the same instant, and his first movement swept away the cat.

"I declare! I must have fallen into a doze. Perry? Jessie? Do you see this? There is something remarkable in the instinctive fondness of domestic animals for the human race."

"Just so," said Perry. "If Pawnees had come they could hardly have gotten at you without stepping on one of them. Bob was awake, too. He's worth all the rest of us for a sentinel."

Then Jessie heard for the first time the story of Red Beauty and the blanket, and she and Perry set themselves at work to get as much camp-keeping done as might be before their father and mother should open their eyes. The fire was well agoing before the sun looked in above the rim of the prairie.

Before that time there had been a great disturbance among Mr. Chumley's dogs. All six of them began to bark or bay at the same moment, as if some kind of canine alarm-clock had been sprung in each dog's throat.

There was a rustling inside of the house, and then a sort of bung was removed from a hole in

the front door. A rifle could have been shoved through that hole, but all that came out of it now was a deep voice inquiring,—

"Well? What are you here for now? Is anything up?"

"Chumley want UP. Red Beauty good Indian. Hate Pawnee."

That word seemed to be enough. The gray-headed old wanderer sat on his pony by the gate, in patient silence, until Chumley came out to ask him the full meaning of so early a call. Of course it meant breakfast, but any one familiar with Indian ways could tell that it meant more.

"He can't speak the truth to save his life," said Chumley to himself, "but I may learn something."

That was just before he put out his hand and said,—

"How! Get down. I'll give you and your pony a feed. What about the Pawnees?"

"Jerry McCord kill Red Beauty if he know."

"He'll never know. Trust me."

"Know Chumley. Lie a heap. Good friend, all same. Jerry McCord say he kill Chumley pretty soon. 'Teal squaw, too."

He made a pointing motion in the direction of the Munro camp as he spoke, and Chumley's eyes flashed fire as he sharply asked,—

"Has he been there already? Did you see him?"

"Chumley go there. Ask who bring deer. Tell

him 'Payne.' Red Beauty know Payne. Chumley know him. All bad. Pawnee come pretty soon. Take horse. Take 'calp. Take squaw. Jerry McCord big devil. Mean to kill Red Beauty. Keep his mouth shut."

The keen eyes of the old Potawatamy had read the outlaw's face as if it had been a book, and his present errand had in it more than a little of the cunning of self-preservation.

"That's it, is it?" said Chumley. "Well. We'll have some breakfast and then we'll go over. Did you tell the Munros?"

"'Poke to boy. Old man fool. Other old man too much medicine. Boy young brave. Red Beauty keep away. Jerry come shoot him. No fool to get kill."

"That 'll do," said Chumley. "I'll see about Jerry's business. It's time somebody put daylight into him. All I want is a good reason to give a jury."

The Indian understood him, for he responded, without moving a muscle of his face,—

"Tree no tell. Stand all round and say nothing. Big tree keep mouth shut. Bush cover hole. Put Jerry in. Stay there. Nobody ask where gone, so he no come back."

"Just so," said Chumley. "You can come in. I'll attend to my stock while they're getting breakfast ready."

The voices in the house announced that all were stirring, and Gustav was quickly out attending to his share of what country people call "chores." There were indications that some of the stock was his own, and that he was not so entirely employed by Chumley that he was not preparing to occupy and use his own land in due season.

CHAPTER XVII.

"HOLD UP YOUR HANDS."

Jerry McCord's Pawnees awoke slowly that summer morning, thief after thief being stirred up roughly to find that the alcoholic cloud was yet pressing upon such brains as he might have. All the poison which had not been consumed the previous evening was now securely hidden, and coffee had to be taken instead. There were plain reasons for a belief that the surrounding country was safe from any mischievous activity of that gang for at least a day or so. One after another they each went and took a long look at the dead sentry. Every "brave" said "Ugh!" in his regular turn, but nothing more until the murderer himself finished a stupid stare and then asked of Jerry McCord,—

"Kill him 'cause he go drunk and sleep hard?"

"Ugh!" "Ugh!" "Ugh!" again went the rounds of the dusky circle, but a moment's meditation put away the idea as untenable. Jerry was not that kind of disciplinarian, and the murdered man had been one of his warmest supporters always.

They were all detectives as well as thieves, but that case was too much for them. The deed had been so utterly without apparent motive that there were no traces leading up to it, and the actual doer of it was safe behind the wooden stolidity of his own unwitnessing features.

All that could be done by Jerry was to leave orders for a burial, eat his own breakfast, and ride away, with his disgust for vagabond red men made stronger than ever by a thought which came to him:

"That suspicion may take root. If it does, I shall be found dead at the foot of some tree or other and no man will know how. It's about time for me to get married and settle down. They'd murder me for a pipe of tobacco."

If he had added "or for nothing," he would have expressed the truth exactly, and their camp was not the only place where his life was likely to be an insecure possession.

During all that time the sun had not paused for a moment, and the morning had grown busy at other places. "Chores" and breakfast were over at Chumley's, and preparations were making to spend the day with the Munro family.

The Red Beauty made no preparations. He filled his pipe for the second time with the tobacco given him, and sat down on the doorstep as if he knew no happier place on earth.

"Come," said Chumley. "Get pony."

"No. Ugh! Red Beauty stay here. No see medicine man any more. Give him too much pill."

He was but dimly understood, but Chumley's thoughts recurred correctly to Uncle John. He responded,—

"What can you do here?"

"'Teal Chumley horse. Kill dog. Burn house. Milk cow. Keep eye open nobody come. Red Beauty not want Jerry McCord find him. Jerry keep away from Chumley house. Good Indian all safe. Not go to pill man."

"Stay, then," said Chumley. "You won't do any mischief. Watch the ranch. Look out for Pawnees."

"Chumley heap fool."

"What for?"

"Not shoot Jerry. Not shoot Pawnee."

"Don't want to be hung," said Chumley.

"No hang. Say Indian do it. All white man say 'good.' No hang good Indian just for little kill and 'calp."

"Something in that," said Chumley, "or you'd have been hung long ago."

"Ugh! Red Beauty no fool. Try shoot first

every time. Chumley wait. Stand 'till. Jerry shoot first. Send Pawnee for Chumley 'calp maybe."

Chumley's mouth gave signs that the counsel was by no means lost upon him. He left his remarkable garrison in full charge of the premises. He also left a setter and a stag-hound in charge of the red garrison, and took but four dogs with him to visit Bob Munro.

Bob had no idea that he had company coming, but his human fellow-immigrants were very much exercised about the help they were to have in putting up their patent house. In the excitement of the previous evening not a great deal had been said about their neighbors, but now that they expected to see them soon it was different.

"Mother," said Jessie, "what do you think of Mr. Chumley?"

"He was a great surprise to me, after what we had heard."

"He was to me. He seemed to wish to be polite and neighborly."

"Jessie," said Mrs. Munro, emphatically, "I don't know what to say. He is a very young man. Too young to have been married and separated without something dreadful. I'm in doubt how to treat him."

"We do not know one thing. Mr. Payne said he didn't and nobody else did."

"Neither do we, my dear, but we can watch our conduct carefully. I suppose the Swedish family work for him. Immigrants of the ordinary, coarse kind."

"Erica is a pretty enough name."

At that moment Perry came to take a part in that conversation, and his first question was,—

"Jessie, what's your idea about Payne?"

"He's a handsome fellow, but I don't like his face. Mother doesn't."

"She needn't, then, nor you either. I mean to ask Chumley about him. I believe he's a rascal."

"Not Mr. Chumley!"

"No, indeed. There's a good ring in that man's voice. Guess he'll be a good neighbor. Wouldn't like to quarrel with him, though."

Jessie paused a moment, for an idea of something hard, obstinate, overbearing, relentless, came into her mind as she thought of Chumley. It was not an attractive idea, but it was not weak or mean or false, and she said to her brother,—

"Ask him about Payne, then. I'd believe him."

Perry remembered his promise to the Red Beauty just in time to not reveal the source of his own evil impressions, and turned away to the spot where Mrs. Munro was now telling her husband and his brother precisely how and where the house was to stand.

Even Uncle John had worked tremendously that morning. There was one door of the house, for instance, which he had turned over ten times in an effort to ascertain its inner character, as belonging to the front or rear, and had finally concluded that it would work better as a side door. It was a comfort to him that the window-sashes were all alike, and his mind grew more and more easy until an idea flashed upon him. It came too suddenly to be suppressed or adjusted, and it sprang from his lips in the very unlucky form:

"Maria! We brought no cellar!"

Perry heard him and shouted,—

"Hurrah for Uncle John! I'll ask Chumley if he hasn't got an old cellar he can lend us."

"Mistakes of expression will at times arise unavoidably," said Uncle John. "What I mean is that we have no time to dig one under this house. Excavation——"

"Chumley says logs are the thing, and I believe him," said Perry. "We'll have a cellar under the log part of our palace. Look out yonder! They're coming. What a lot of dogs! The women have come, too. Now there'll be a time!"

It was a day for enthusiasm. Something of the sort showed itself in the way in which the hounds and the setter came racing forward to investigate the Munro train, and in the depth and vigor of Bob's sonorous welcome. It was a grand thing to

have neighbors; and he was answered by throats as deep as his own and even more musical.

"Splendid fellows!" exclaimed Perry. "Jessie, I like Chumley better than I did, now I've seen his dogs. There isn't a cur among them."

Bob and his neighbors were upon good terms at once, and he seemed disposed to show them all there was of the Munro outfit. Then he led them down to the brook, and every dog of them took a drink and seemed to approve the quality of the water. Not one of them was so lacking in good sense as to have preferred a beverage fit only for horse-thieves and vagabond Pawnees.

Mrs. Munro's fine black eyes saw a great deal at any time, and she took especial note of the perfect skill with which Chumley performed all the processes required to make his Swedish friends at home with their new acquaintances. It was kindly well done, and so finished that Jessie found herself in charge of Erica without an effort on her part that she was aware of. At the same moment it was manifest that the Munros were an astonished family all around. Jessie's mother, for instance, was inwardly exclaiming,—

"Swedish immigrants? Why, Mrs. Eagleson is a noble-looking woman, and her daughter is beautiful!"

Perry's eyes betrayed his opinion for him, but did not fail to note that the iron melted away a

little from Chumley's mouth when he saw how his friends were received.

Jessie led Erica away upon a sort of tour of inspection, and for all the rest of them there lay the house. It was all numbered, ready for use, except the side-rear-front door which had so puzzled Uncle John. This was one of the first important matters pointed out to Chumley, and he responded,—

"Measure and see where it fits."

"I'll do it," said Uncle John. "I never thought of that."

He did so, with scientific exactness and great rapidity, for him. In about a minute and a half the problem was solved, for Uncle John arose, rule in hand, to remark,—

"This door is too large! It belongs to some other house!"

"Never mind," said Chumley. "We can cut it down to the right size. That isn't the first thing. What you want now is a good post for each corner. Sink 'em in the ground, you know. Something for the house to stand upon."

"Exactly," said Uncle John. "I suppose my brother and I could dig those holes."

"Eagleson is a first-class axeman. He and Perry and I had better go to the timber at once. Get the holes ready while we're gone."

So was it done, and every dog followed the squad

of post-cutters into the timber. Perry Munro had as yet hardly said ten words to Erica Eagleson, but the thought in his mind as he set off was,—

"Glad she isn't coming. I wouldn't like her to see how I bungle with an axe. What eyes, and what magnificent hair!"

He was a pretty good hand with tools for his age, but it somehow seemed, curiously, as if such blue eyes as Erica's ought to look only upon perfection. At least in anything done by Mr. Perry Munro.

They were to look upon something very imperfect before long, but just now they were following those of Jessie among the half-unpacked treasures of Yankee housekeeping.

"No breakages yet, Jessie," said Mrs. Munro. "It is really wonderful. I was afraid that that china cream-jug would lose its nose, but it hasn't."

"Erica," said Jessie, "do you know the English names of all these?"

"Not all," said Erica, with a merry, musical laugh. "Mr. Chumley taught me all I know. Books, too."

"He must be a good teacher."

"Best friend. So very good, kind, always thoughtful——"

"Are you afraid of him?"

"Afraid of Mr. Chumley?" she was almost grave for a moment, and then she added: "I suppose so. Not wish him to be angry."

"That's what I thought. But then you like him?"

"Oh, very much!" and the earnest frankness of her answer had in it something all but enthusiastic. It should have been heard by Jerry McCord, to have encouraged him in killing Chumley to secure Erica's good opinion.

All there was as bright and cheery as the June sunshine, but away in under the trees of the forest there were shadows. One very dark shadow was upon the face of a rider who drew his rein and looked and listened and then took from his pocket a double spy-glass. He made a thoroughly careful survey of the Munro camp, and then remarked to himself,—

"Perry is gone. That is probably his axe that I hear. Dog is with him of course. There are Mr. Munro and his brother. Mrs. Munro. Jessie. Two other women. Yes, that's Erica! What shall I do now?"

A more perplexing question could hardly be propounded to a handsome young man who was desperately in love with two women and preferred to court them separately.

Again and again he studied the situation, through his glass, and the more he looked the more completely did his vanity and his double-headed passion get the better of him. The cunning of some serpents is very coarse-fibred and shallow, and gets

them into difficulties. Otherwise it would be more difficult to catch and kill snakes than it now is.

"It won't be a bad thing to see them together," he said to himself. "Erica won't dream of saying anything awkward before Jessie and her mother. She will see that I am on good terms with the Munros, and that 'll help. If I could get Jessie jealous of Erica it would be a good thing to do."

There was a vast amount of confidence in his own power to please hidden under that crude idea. At all events, his handsome face wore its most taking smile when he rode in. He sent a hearty hail to the two men digging post-holes, and then he swung his hat to the ladies in a sweeping bow and sprang lightly to the ground beside them. His whole manner was that of an accepted friend of the family, to Erica's astonishment, and her mother did not guess who the stranger might be until she looked at the fair girl's painfully burning face.

Neither Jessie nor Mrs. Munro had noticed that, for they were replying to the salutations of Mr. Payne, while Erica had shrinkingly stepped back a pace or two. She responded by no syllable to the greeting sent her over their shoulders by the man she had met so romantically under the greenwood tree.

Mrs. Munro had eyes and thoughts which worked rapidly, and in another instant they told her something.

"Chumley and he are enemies," she said to herself. "Erica knows it. The meeting is unpleasant to them."

Nevertheless she said to him,—

"I suppose, Mr. Payne, you are acquainted with Mrs. Eagleson and her daughter, Erica. I need not take the trouble to introduce old settlers."

"I have met Miss Erica," said Payne with his best manner, just as Mrs. Eagleson bluntly put into words the meaning of a slight flash that was rising in her blue eyes.

"No," she said, "I do not know him. Erica knows him not. You tell me who he is."

The whole situation was dreadfully tangled in a moment. The girls were not in the least jealous of each other as yet, but neither of them knew what to do or say. To Mrs. Munro it was a further tangle that she knew nothing of Chumley or his Swedish friends, and that would have been worse but for the honest faces of Erica and her mother.

"Mr. Payne," she said in her dilemma, "I wish you would go and talk with Mr. Munro for a moment."

She had help just there, for the two diggers had left their work and were close at hand.

"How are you to-day, Mr. Payne?" said Uncle John, heartily, and "Howd'ye do, Payne? Didn't look for you again so soon," said Mr. Munro, but their frank greetings came too late.

The suspicious vanity of Jerry McCord had taken fire, and he almost forgot that he was Edward Payne, the land-owner, free hunter, the lover, as he fiercely exclaimed,—

"Who has been slandering me? Who has dared to say a word against me?"

"Nobody," promptly replied both Mrs. Munro and her husband, while Uncle John added,—

"I have not heard a breath against your character. What is the matter with you?"

There was a professional sound in that, and the symptoms denoted feverish excitability, aggravated by the fact that Erica had drawn farther away and that Jessie instinctively fell back with her.

"I wish to speak with Mrs. Eagleson, Mr. Payne," persisted Mrs. Munro, and it seemed that he retained some traces of early training if not of worldly wisdom, for he permitted himself to be left with the two men. There was not a lady, young or old, within twenty feet of him, when something occurred altogether new and unexpected.

The axe listened to by Jerry before he left the woods had been chopping its last chips of its set task. It does not take long for a good axeman to fell a couple of slender young pines, and for him and two others to cut from them four five-feet long corner posts. The work in the timber had been rapidly completed, therefore, and each of the choppers took up a post to return. The broad shoulders

of Gustav were none too heavily laden with two, and the patent house would now be sure of having feet to stand upon.

The approach of the post-bearers had been altogether unnoticed, or the women might have seen a thing that astonished Gustav and Perry.

Chumley had been in a most neighborly frame of mind apparently, and had even made efforts to laugh, with some success. They were all walking along leisurely and chatting about houses, when suddenly a sharp exclamation hissed from Chumley's lips, and he went forward as if he had been sent for.

"What's up now?" said Perry, but no answer came back to him, and he and Gustav could but follow. At the very moment when Mrs. Munro said to Mrs. Eagleson,—

"We met him on the road as we came. I wish you would tell us anything that you know about him."

Erica's mother's one hand was upon her shoulder, and she was pointing with the other towards Jerry, asking,—

"He? Erica, speak! Was it he?"

Uncle John was remarking,—

"Now, Mr. Payne, let them talk. If you've anything you want to say to Joe and me, say it right out."

Just then, as if the entire situation had been

"Throw up your hands!"

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arranged for mischief, the choppers came hastily up. Chumley threw his length of pine upon the ground and stepped swiftly over it, but the glittering black eyes of the outlaw were already on him, and his hand was grasping at something concealed by his loose blue coat.

There had been the quickness of lightning in Chumley's movements, for a cocked derringer pistol was in his hand as he now shouted,—

"What are you doing here, Jerry McCord? Throw up your hands!"

"Mr. Chumley!" screamed Mrs. Munro. "You do not mean to murder him?"

"No fighting, Chumley," said her husband, with very creditable firmness of nerve; and Uncle John exclaimed, loudly, "I command the peace." Jessie felt Erica's arm closing tightly around her, and saw Perry pick up a large stick, just as Chumley repeated, with blood-curdling emphasis,—

"Up with your hands!"

The one under Jerry's coat let go its hold upon the revolver butt it had been grasping, and both mechanically obeyed, for the blue barrel of Chumley's derringer was looking the outlaw terribly in the face.

"You've got the drop on me this time, Chumley," he said. "My turn next. I'll be even with you before I die."

"Perry Munro," said Chumley, "will you be

good enough to bring this villain's horse right here? He must get out of this."

"Mr. Chumley," said Mrs. Munro, as her son walked away, "what do you know against Mr. Payne?"

The lips of Jessie and Erica were trembling with the same question, and Mrs. Eagleson actually asked it in pure Swedish.

"Mr. Payne is Jerry McCord, the white Pawnee, a horse-thief, and he knows better than to tell me I am lying when I say so. Get on your horse, Jerry. You won't murder me any the sooner for this. Mount!"

The handsome features of the lost white man worked almost convulsively. He was not lacking in physical courage, but there was no hesitation in the eye or mouth of the man whose finger rested on the trigger of that derringer. Sure Death said, "Touch not a weapon, but mount and ride!" and he did so. He was in the saddle before Uncle John found breath to remark,—

"I am glad to learn his real character," while Mr. Munro added, "I never heard of such a thing in my life."

The blue eyes of Erica's father were dancing strangely, and his white teeth were showing through his tawny beard as if the blood of the Vikings were rising. His daughter still had her arm around Jessie as if seeking protection, but the only color

in Jessie's face was in her eyes. All the rest had fled in terror from the awful idea presented by the levelled pistol and the raised hands of Jerry McCord.

The latter rode slowly away for fifty yards, halted, shook his clinched fist, and shouted,—

"Your blood is on your own head from this day forward!"

"Very well!" was all the reply, but the words seemed to have bodies, so dense were they with meaning.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Munro. It was absolutely necessary. That fellow must never come here again."

She could hardly believe her eyes or ears. Chumley was under no excitement whatever. He was actually smiling and his voice was full of apologetic modulation.

"Do you suppose he will do as he says? Will he try to kill you?"

"Certainly, unless he and his gang find the country too hot for them and clear out. I've notified the authorities till I'm tired of it."

"Why did you draw a pistol?" asked Perry Munro, with a dissatisfied air.

"That, now, is a fair question," said Chumley. "Because the fellow is a coward and was on the point of pulling out his own. He is enough afraid of me to have used it at once. If he had been one

of his own Pawnees I'd never have dreamed of showing a weapon. You never can tell what a coward will do and call it courage. Half the murders on the border are done out of fear, and the other half out of whiskey."

"There is philosophy in that explanation," said Uncle John, and Chumley changed the subject:

"Is my apology accepted, Mrs. Munro? Are you satisfied, Perry? Then let's put the posts right in."

There was something masterful about the man, and Uncle John replied,—

"I wish I had another hole ready dug for these two other corners." And Perry at once picked up a spade as if he meant to make one.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DOG MURDER.

Red Beauty was worthy of all the confidence reposed in him by Chumley, and as soon as the latter was out of sight he proceeded to obtain a clear perception of its amount and degree.

The front door stood wide open, and the Potawatamy garrison walked in as if entering his own property.

In the middle of the room stood the dining-table,

but it was bare, save for a box of smoking tobacco, thoughtfully left out as "supplies."

Swift glances around discovered nothing else except the customary very plain furniture and a double-barrelled gun, which was resting its muzzle lazily against the wall in one corner. This had to be examined, of course, and the discovery by Red Beauty that it was loaded brought forth the remark,—

"Chumley heap shoot. Good gun."

He had company now, for both the setter and the stag-hound saw him enter and came bounding along to know what was going on. They danced all around him while he examined the gun, whining their desire for a hunt and their doubt whether or not it was their duty to make him put it down.

He turned to the door of Chumley's own room and tried it, but it was locked and the setter growled. He crossed to the door of the other bedroom, and barely ascertained that it was also locked before the hound took his turn for a growl. Both dogs seemed entirely satisfied when he walked out into the open area back of that room and through it to the kitchen on the left. An ample dinner for the garrison lay covered by a pan on the kitchen table, but nothing else was lying around loosely.

"Good dog," said Red Beauty, as he gave them each a scrap. "Old chief keep dog from 'tealing. Chumley house heap poor."

He did not say "Ugh!" again with any special energy until he had tried the stable-doors and discovered that they were barred on the inside in a peculiarly strong and troublesome way.

"Horse no got gun," he said. "Jerry McCord Pawnee take axe."

He had no purpose of using one, but he looked around as if to see if any such tool were available in case of need. Not one was to be found, and again the Red Beauty remarked upon the poverty of Chumley's house. He seemed to have a further curiosity as to how the stable-doors could be fastened on the inside, but his fumbling inquiries were now rewarded by a double growl of dissatisfaction.

He studied the situation in silence for a moment, and then went out for a look at four mules belonging to Gustav Eagleson which were feeding in the pasture lot.

"Chumley lock up three horse. Leave out mule. Bring in mule, lock 'em up in house? No. Ugh! Pawnee 'teal mule some day. Red Beauty *find* a mule good many time. Good Indian, no 'teal."

The front room now seemed to have a peculiar charm of its own. For the first time in his peculiar life the old Potawatamy had a house to himself, and he made the most of it. He drew a chair to the table, filled his pipe again, lighted it, sat down, and seemed to be thinking. The table carried one other evidence of civilized ownership besides the box of

tobacco. Not many men on that frontier could have made more out of that small, plainly bound volume than did the strangely visaged Indian who now picked it up, remarking,—

"Book. Talk to Chumley. See if talk to Red Beauty. Heap devil. Big lie. Tell how make gun, maybe. Say where go find whiskey. Look a long time."

He had evidently obtained, in some way, the idea that books required to be "studied" before they would speak, and he was willing to give to that copy of Homer's Iliad, in the original Greek, all the study required to make it tell him what it knew about anything.

He studied it right side up, wrong side up, outside, inside, sidewise, and from cover to cover. Every now and then a disappointed grunt testified to his deficiency in Greek literature. It was an uncommon case of the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties, and a vast amount of patience was exhibited as time went on. The dogs regarded that sort of amusement as entirely innocent, and went out to patrol the enclosure.

The ears of the dusky student were of a kind that is always on duty, and at last they brought him a warning that made him lay down the book.

"Ugh! Horse foot come. Shut door. Nobody in house."

He closed the door quickly, and pulled out the

"bung" from the hole in the middle of it, just as the voices of the dogs announced the nearer approach of a horse and his rider.

"Ugh! Jerry McCord! Come say 'Payne.' Know Chumley gone. Find Red Beauty here, kill him. Nobody here. House dead."

It was Jerry, fresh from his terrible experience at the Munro camp, and red-hot with vengeance. He himself could hardly have explained why he had ridden around by way of Chumley's house, unless it had been with a vague idea of burning it, with all that it contained. He reined in his horse for one moment at the gate, and the two beautiful animals on the inside arose with their forepaws on its bars, barking at him in the most friendly manner. They were glad to see somebody, and may have been telling him that their master was away.

There are depths of meanness and cruelty in the hearts of some beings who are nominally human. Jerry McCord believed himself unseen, or he would have considered the matter before acting. As it was, he drew his revolver, took deliberate aim, and shot the stag-hound through the head. In another instant the setter lay beside him, and a wretched act of cowardly spite was completed.

"I'll serve your master in the same way yet!" he shouted, shaking his fist at the house, but at that moment something moved in the middle of the door. It came out farther, pointing straight at

him. It was the muzzle of a double-barrelled gun, and Jerry's horse bounded away under a sudden dig of spurs that sent him galloping up the road. He was out of range in a moment, and the gun did not go off. At the other end of it the Red Beauty was exhausting his supply of English words in an attempt to express his opinion of Jerry McCord.

"Heap devil! Shoot dog! Dog himself! White Pawnee t'ief! 'Calp a mule! Ugh! Red Beauty no shoot him. Kill him other time, sure. See Chumley gun, not know him. Not show him Red Beauty rifle, tell him who here."

That was the fact, and Jerry rode away without a suspicion concerning the garrison of Chumley's house. He only carried with him a vivid understanding that he had narrowly escaped a charge of buckshot, dangerous at fifty yards, and that Chumley would know who had killed his two dogs.

"He will raise the country on me now," he said. "He can gather a score of men if he tries, and they'd make short work of us. Most of 'em have lost horses one time or another. We must move out of this, short order, but I'll come back for her. Chumley 'll die about that time, or I'm mistaken. No time to lose in moving our camp."

It came out disjointedly, and mingled with profane explosions of vengeful bitterness, as he rode along, but that was the sum and substance of it.

War had been openly declared upon both sides, and there could be no doubt as to the determination with which it would be carried on.

For a few minutes after Jerry's departure, Chumley was able to direct the attention of Mr. Munro and Perry and Uncle John to the posts and holes, mainly because they were like him and wished to collect their ideas in silence.

Then they broke out in a storm of questionings concerning Indians, horse-thieves, and other pests of the border, and there was more than a little to tell. It was a curious fact, but the manner in which Jerry had wilted before Chumley's derringer had fully established their confidence in the latter. They were ready to credit whatsoever he might tell them.

Gustav Eagleson had not said a word, neither had he as yet done anything especial for the new house. He had fully comprehended that this driven thief was the stranger who had accosted Erica in the forest, and the blood of the sea-kings was playing fire in all his veins. A full supply of it was in his face, and its expression of intense wrath was worth looking at. He was a man of peace and knew not how to swear, but he was an exceedingly angry father, and the very curls of his tawny beard seemed to bristle with a purpose of no good to Jerry McCord.

There had been genuine delicacy in Chumley's

leaving the ladies by themselves, and they promptly made the distance greater between them and the group of men.

"Jessie," said her mother, "we shall know all Chumley tells them. Come along. This is dreadful!"

Mrs. Eagleson was even eager to tell all she knew, while Erica hid her innocent face in her hands. Jessie heard with kindling eyes, and all Jerry's ideal prospect of creating jealousy between her and Erica had vanished by the time she was mentally ready to exclaim,—

"Is it possible! And he a horse-thief!"

Jerry lost the entire teaching of the shudder sent after him by the two beautiful beings with whom he was in love, and it was a pity, considering how deep a lesson it had for him.

That was a moment of mutual confidences, and even for hasty speech, since Mrs. Munro herself suddenly asked,—

"Where does Mrs. Chumley live?"

Erica looked at her with inquiring amazement, but her mother flushed hotly and responded,—

"We live with him four year. No wife at all. Good young man."

"There! It was one of that rascal's miserable falsehoods. Don't you see, Jessie? He tried to set us against him."

"He is wicked!" exclaimed Erica, but Jessie was

silent. It was not easy to reconcile such a depth of depravity and meanness with so much easy politeness and personal good looks. Jessie was young yet, and this was her first discovered villain.

She had read of such instances, but had an idea that they existed only in the heated imaginations of the men and women who write novels. Now she had seen one, and also, for the first time, she had seen a weapon levelled by one man at another in deadly earnest, and that fact came to her lips in a general question addressed to nobody in particular:

"Would Mr. Chumley have killed him?"

"Jessie," said her mother, "would you have had him get out his pistol and shoot Mr. Chumley? It would have been no murder if he had——"

"Oh, mother!"

No doubt it was something dreadful to think of, and there was more to be said by all, but right in the middle of it they saw Chumley go and get his horse and mount him and ride away, sending them only a silent bow as a good-by. Before doing so he had said to the other men,—

"Now you all work along. I want to see how matters are going on over at my house. Nobody is there but Red Beauty."

"That is," said Perry, "if he is there. I hope you didn't leave any blankets lying around."

"I feel pretty sure that he wouldn't steal from me. As for your blanket, that's nothing against

him. He really could not help it. Long habit is too much for even the best of men."

He laughed almost merrily, and strode away to where his horse was waiting to be saddled. In a minute or so more he was riding swiftly homeward. He had seen Jerry gallop off towards the woods, but the thought had come to him that there was no certainty of his continuing in that direction. As he drew near his house he noted instantly its shut-up and deserted appearance, and exclaimed,—

"Where is that old red rascal? Where are the dogs? He cannot have stolen them. They would not follow him a rod. He must have shut them into the house and gone away. I can't see his pony."

That animal was securely hidden behind the house, between the stable and the kitchen, and in a few moments more Chumley knew why his dogs did not come to meet him. He sent his horse over the fence with a long bound and wheeled him for a look at the two favorites, lying side by side on the bloody grass. He had not uttered a sound when the door of the house opened and the Red Beauty stepped out.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, in a voice that was husky with suppressed passion.

"Mean Jerry McCord. Put gun through door and scare him away. No see Red Beauty. Only see double gun. Ride off."

"Why didn't you kill him?"

"Ugh! Not kill him here. Not by Chumley house. Somebody come, ask old Indian who kill him? What for? Only for kill dog? Then have to hold up hand and say 'Chumley did it.' Bad for Chumley. Go hung for shoot. Meet him 'nother place, some time."

Chumley's reason fully approved of the old man's prudence, whatever he might think of having a murder sworn upon himself.

"Either of those dogs was worth a dozen of him. Tell me all about it. I'm glad you waited till I came."

Red Beauty gave a full account of Jerry's visit, and explained his own impression that his life was of about the value of a pipe of tobacco in any convenient meeting with Jerry or his Pawnees.

"Red Beauty good Indian. Too good. Kill him like dog if nobody see. Chumley just so. See dog? Ugh! Chumley that one, when Jerry McCord see his back."

"You're right there. He won't be here again to-day, anyhow. Will you stay here till sundown?"

"'Tay all while, plenty eat. Plenty smoke. Plenty book."

"Book? What's that?"

He had already dismounted, and now led the way into the house. His first glance fell upon the volume of Homer, but he was still too angry to

laugh. He took the matter soberly, and told the Red Beauty to read as much Greek as he had a mind to. After that he only remained long enough to start a fire in the kitchen stove.

"Good. Ugh!" said the Potawatamy. "Jerry not kill dog if saw smoke when he came."

Chumley nodded, for he had in that matter neglected one of his customary precautions. He sprang into the saddle once more, and it was not long before the eyes of Jessie and Erica and the rest were blazing with indignation over the account he gave them of the cruel cowardice of Jerry McCord's revenge. Doubt as to his "character" had utterly disappeared.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHANGES OF BASE.

The entire western country, as fast as it can be surveyed, is cut up on the government maps into "sections" of one mile square. Each of these is supposed to contain six hundred and forty acres, and would do so if it were not for the errors of surveyors and for the fact that the earth is round and has its own way with all attempts to draw straight lines upon it.

The Munros had bought a section of land to prosper on, and it began, as Chumley's did, at the Post, running side by side with it into the forest. He had vaguely mentioned other tracts of land owned by him, adjoining at the south. The "quarter section" owned by the Eaglesons also claimed the Post as a corner landmark.

The spot selected for the Munro camp and homestead was nearly in the middle of their square mile of fertility, and for that reason there was a prospect before their visitors of a pleasant walk home after supper. That meal was made as bright a picnic as possible, after the toil and excitement of the day. Jessie and her mother did their best to make Chumley forget the fate of his dogs, but it was Perry who decided in his own mind that hospitality demanded of him to see his guests safely home.

"Chumley will ride, of course. It'll just be a nice walk," he said to himself, and when he mentioned the idea to Jessie, she replied, promptly,—

"The very thing we ought to do. I'll walk with Erica."

There was something of sly mischief in that response, but the evening walk shaped itself differently. The shadows were reaching out into the prairie more and more duskily, when at last Chumley whistled to his horse and remarked to Mrs. Munro,—

"Gustav and Mrs. Eagleson have started. Erica and I will be glad of company."

The horse came up with a ready obedience which testified that he was in no need of bridle or spur. He was quite capable of following his master at a short distance, and knew exactly the way to his own stable door. His master was every way equal to the occasion, for the camp was only a few rods behind them before Jessie found herself walking in advance with Chumley, while her brother followed with Erica. Behind them marched the horse, and all around them raced the dogs.

Perry Munro did not walk far before he discovered several facts concerning his companion, for she was utterly free of speech, and seemed to regard him altogether as a neighbor and a desirable addition to the population of that prairie. He found that she had formed a girlish enthusiasm for Jessie and a great admiration for his mother. Also that before either of them came she had learned to regard Mr. Chumley as a man superior to other men, to be looked up to by them as well as by herself. Perry had as yet seen nothing wonderful about him, except pluck and good horsemanship, and was only able to give a polite assent to what she had to say. She listened with keen intelligence to his story of the village home he and his family had left behind them in the East. She had a starting-place to speak of, much farther away, and

neither of them knew how deftly Jessie had been defeated in an effort to draw from Mr. Chumley an idea of some place or places he had seen before he saw that prairie. She could find no fault with any of his replies, but they told her nothing whatever, and left her curiosity in a state of unconsciously increasing activity concerning the history he had so plain an intention of concealing. She gained a dim idea that he had travelled and that he was well read, and another, yet more dim, that he was reading her as they walked. He said as much to himself:

"I'm a stranger to her yet. There's more than that in her mind about me. She will make a splendid woman yet. How that strange resemblance does grow on me! Only skin-deep, but I wish it had not come. Why should my bitterest memory settle down on the next section to haunt me here? It isn't her fault, I suppose."

His thoughts were dealing, as they often seemed to be, with some irritating experience of his old life. However they were connected with her face, an expression of them crept into the cool politeness of his manner, and when she said,—

"Do you never feel lonely out here, in such an utter absence of society?"

He replied with needless brevity,—

"Never!" and it was a full breathing spell before he added: "I cannot say, however, how glad I now

am to have neighbors. I trust that we shall be good friends."

"Is not this the Pawnee Trail?" she remarked, striving to conceal an unaccountable feeling of vexation.

"Yes. Did you ever see a string of beads?"

"Of course."

"Well, this is a string, then, with wild stories all along it as thick as beads."

"Terrible tales, no doubt. I'm not sure I wish to hear them. Anyhow, it is the border of our land." She hesitated one second, and he filled up the sentence calmly:

"And you will not venture into the unknown country called Chumley's land until to-morrow? We shall expect you at supper-time."

"Thank you, we have quite a curiosity about your log house. I was never in one."

At that moment Perry and Erica joined them, and four voices instead of two went through the ceremony of separating for the night at the barrier drawn by the old buffalo-path.

Chumley and Erica walked on homeward, and he had little to do but to listen to her comments upon her new friends and the great and small events of the day.

Jessie was almost glad that her brother seemed disposed to silence. There had been talk enough, and she was trying to put into shape the cloudy

unpleasantness which hovered over her ideas of Chumley.

Perry was also busy with a cloudy unpleasantness. He was very young, and he had never before seen any girl one half so beautiful, in his eyes, as Erica Eagleson. Young men have a faculty all their own for the manufacture of angels out of very human material, and Perry had seen his angel walk away from him with the man she had been so enthusiastically praising.

So it was that they told each other they were tired, and said almost nothing more.

They had by no means forgotten Jerry McCord, although he still came up in Jessie's mind as a very good-looking bad man named Payne, but they had no idea how much in his thoughts they themselves had been and were likely to be.

When Jerry galloped away out of range of the gun which looked at him through Chumley's front door, he did not ride alone by any means. There was no second horse, but with him on his own there sat a shape which he had been visited by before. He had put it away, he had refused to see it, and now here it was, looking at him with every pair of human eyes he had seen that day, while it whispered hissingly in his ears the awful fact that he was to all intents and purposes a "branded man." He had been putting brands upon himself from boyhood, and now they had been publicly pointed out.

Chumley had pointed at them, before Jessie and before Erica, with a levelled derringer to emphasize the bitter sincerity of his pointing. Jerry had no power of profane speech to express his hatred of that man, and he gave it up with grinding teeth and writhing body.

"An outlaw?" he said at last, pulling his horse to a walk. "Not so bad as that. They can prove nothing against me. I must move the band farther south. We could be found too easily where we are, now Chumley's blood is up. It's too near, anyhow, if I'm to make a strike."

What kind of a strike he was meditating did not yet take on a perfect form in his tumultuous mind.

The very stab given to his vanity in the presence of those four women had stirred another emotional depth remarkably. He had been in love, first with Erica, then with Jessie,—with both of them,—in a fever of fickle selfishness, but in a way that would have admitted of an easy remedy. A prettier face; a richer inheritance; a brief absence among other affairs; an attack of fever and ague; might have relieved him entirely of his sudden romance.

It was not so now. His love was no more the same, for it had been down into the depths of his disgrace and wrath with him, and was thenceforth as deep as was his fiery defiance of the ruin he had brought upon himself. It was a passion of his entire corrupt being, and strong as life. Vanity

might lead him after this to pretend love to Erica, in spite of the look of scorn she had sent him, but his real feeling centred stormily upon Jessie Munro. Her look, in the moment of his branding, had been one which he could easily misinterpret, for she had not had Erica's entire confidence in the correctness of Chumley's conduct. She had been frightened lest "Payne" should be shot down, and she had felt for him as in a terrible position. Her face had strongly disapproved of the derringer, and Jerry easily persuaded himself that its owner had inwardly taken his part. All was black within him and about him except that one red light of passion, and it was the best thing of which he had left himself capable, for as a man is so must be his love for woman.

Jerry rode on to his own camp without stopping, for his plans required prompt action. The report he rendered on arriving was sufficiently interesting without being too exactly truthful. His account of his adventures in the Munro camp included a difficulty with Chumley, but omitted his own obedience to that gentleman's forcible dictation. The group of red listeners were well prepared to believe Jerry's statement that the settlers were devising evil against them. They all said, "Ugh! Good!" when he advised an immediate removal. The killing of Chumley's dogs was approved, with suggestions as to all the other canine settlers near the Post. His

or any other horses and house would be easier of approach after the completion of the work Jerry had begun so well. At the same time the fort-like construction of that home and stable was evidently understood.

As to removal, there was no reason for lingering in one valley rather than in another, and they were now all sober enough to hear arguments based upon angry frontiersmen out after horse-thieves.

No further mention was made of the brave so mysteriously "wiped out." Whoever had killed him, it was not a matter of sufficient importance for further investigation. Dead and buried and forgotten was he, and what other record could there be of the end of such lives as his and theirs? He had not even been the owner of a squaw, and his comrades could divide among themselves his other chattels, with some help from a pack of cards.

Jerry insisted that even the "braves" should work, and the lodges went down while the squaws were "packing," but two rude huts were left standing. The entire party was following the Pawnee Trail westward before the middle of the afternoon, and it looked well for the settlers at Chumley's Post. It also looked as if Jerry and his Pawnees were riding to suit the United States authorities and cavalry commanders, until they suddenly left the Trail and turned southerly among the woods and hills. Their camp that night was a reasonably

close copy of the one they had left, and no more easily to be discovered.

"I can strike Chumley just as well from here," said Jerry McCord to himself; "but I won't bring Jessie here. I've money enough. If I'm not mistaken, she'll agree with me that we had better make a trip to the settlements and leave all this thing behind us. I'll sell stock and get things together, and buying land is easy enough."

Very remarkable stuff were his dreams made of, but they set his blood on fire and made his wild heart beat strongly, for the worst of men is nevertheless a man.

CHAPTER XX.

STIRRING AN OLD STORY.

The very demon of work had possessed the Munro family during that first day of house-building, and seemed likely to remain among them. There was not much of the patent house, but all its parts were there, ready to be fitted, and they went together as if by magic. Five men and four women had made somewhat too strong a force for so narrow a field of operation. The women could bring boards and other wood-work faster than the

men could find out where to put them. Gustav Eagleson had proved himself a master of his tools, and had entered into the spirit of the thing with a cheerfulness which made his white teeth visible half the time. Uncle John had been so carefully guided that he had actually done no harm whatever.

When the promised form of the whole structure began to appear, Chumley had been justified in remarking,—

"It's big enough for a kitchen, but all your other rooms had better be of logs. When this is fastened to 'em it won't blow away."

There had been a general assent to that as well as to Gustav's assertion,—

"It ees too small for so many."

It had not been ready for any one to sleep in that night.

When Chumley and the Eaglesons reached the house in which they intended to sleep, they found something waiting for them. The house indeed was empty, but the Potawatamy garrison had amused himself in his own way before moving out.

Even when the noonday sun had informed Red Beauty that it was dinner-time, it had found him busy with a new idea.

He had made coffee before, and there was nothing wonderful in his putting the coffee-pot upon the stove in the kitchen. He had, however, seen the dinner-tables of pale-faces in his day. He had sat

by more than one after better skill had furnished it, but now it was necessary for his dignity that the table in the front room should be set, and his own hands had to set it.

It was set uncommonly, for he transferred to it every article of crockery that he could lay his hands on. There was no disputing but what he had produced a strikingly effective table when he had finished his work.

The ample supply of cooked victuals left for him was all there, sitting beside the coffee-pot upon a brightly colored hearth-rug. The pipkins and other earthenware had an air as if they were asking of each other,—

"Are we in a lunatic asylum or are we not?"

No smile flickered on the lips of the old Indian, even after he had pulled to the table all the chairs in the room and sat down in one of them.

"Ugh!" he said. "Great chief. Heap eat."

The eating of that solitary meal was a prolonged, grave, and dignified performance, and so was the smoke which followed it, but Red Beauty was aware that the work of clearing away belonged to squaws only. He had condescended to put those things where they were, but he would lower himself no further.

"Great chief no stay in house after heap eat," he said. "Go look for Pawnee."

His pony had also fed well and was ready for

activities. In a few minutes Chumley's garrison was transformed into a scouting expedition, cantering towards the woods.

That was the reason why even Chumley was compelled to join Gustav and his wife and daughter in the fun they had the moment they lighted a candle and could see what was before them in the front room.

Night and sleep came to every house and camp on the prairie and among the hills, but the June darknesses are short, and the morning came quickly with new experiences.

Perry Munro had one that was all his own. Bob had been left on guard, with Chumley's assurance that no other would be needed so soon after unmasking the reality of "Mr. Payne," and all of Bob's weary human friends had slept pretty well. He came with the earliest daylight to stir up Perry, and the cat was the only other person awake when the young man stood by what there was of the patent house and looked around him.

"It seems to me," he said to himself, "as if I'd been in a sort of dream ever since we set out to come West. I'd hardly believe it was real now if it wasn't for what I see. Here's the house. There are the horses and cattle. Glad they're all there. The wagons and Jemima and the pigs. I know who are in the tents, and I know we chopped in that timber. All the rest is a good deal like a dream

yet. Chumley, and Jerry McCord, and Red Beauty,—Pawnees, horse-thieves, pistols, deer,—there'll be venison for breakfast, too. Erica? Oh, but isn't she beautiful! She's too good for such a man as Chumley."

Bob stretched himself and yawned just then, and his master remarked to him,—

"Lost your sleep, did you? Well, you can rest all day. We're all going over to Chumley's by and by, and we'll know more about him and his way of living."

That thought and another concerning breakfast helped make the world around him yet more real, but all the peculiar enthusiasm of Western life was beginning to bubble up within him, and he felt the magic of the prairie without knowing as yet what it might be. By the time he had attended to his live-stock and set the fire agoing, the rest of the family were up and busy.

So were Erica and her mother, over at Chum ley's. They were to spend the day at home while Gustav should be at work on the new house. Chumley himself awoke with a feeling of some curiosity as to what had become of Red Beauty, but no guess of his hit the exact whereabouts of the old Indian.

There was as yet only a dusky glimmer of light upon the hills above the secluded valley where the camp of Jerry's Pawnees had been, when some-

thing like a shadow began to pass from tree to tree and from bush to bush.

"Time for dog to bark. Ugh! No dog. Pawnee gone? Heap fool stay. Jerry say go."

On he went from one cover to another, patiently awaiting and hearkening the voices of the canine watchers who were not there to watch. His conviction of the facts of the case must have been strong to have nerved him to such an intrusion, and he gave a great grunt of relief when at last they were justified. He consumed, even then, a full half-hour of the stealthiest creeping and dodging in perfectly satisfying his mind that Jerry and his fellows had departed and in what direction. It was easy to follow the traces they had left, out to their disappearance in the well-trodden ruts of the Pawnee Trail. That work securely done, the Red Beauty gave vent to his suppressed feelings in a series of ear-splitting whoops, and trudged rapidly back through the woods to the spot where he had hidden his pony. There was no more need for hiding, and he galloped back to Chumley's in time to tell him,—

"Say to young white squaw Jerry McCord gone. Payne gone. Pawnee gone. Come 'teal her some time. Red Beauty eat a heap."

He explained himself fully, and Mrs. Eagleson declared, in Swedish, that she would cook for him till noon to pay for such news as that.

He had already earned an appetite by it, but greater results were to come.

Chumley had something worth while to carry to the Munro camp, and he reached it on horseback before Gustav got there on foot. There was a distinct variation in the tone and manner of every greeting given him, and every shade of heartiness or reserve meant more than he knew, for nobody had told him of any report concerning his past or present.

Uncle John himself expressed the uppermost curiosity of that camp.

"Mr. Chumley," he asked, "have you heard anything more of your friend Payne?"

"Pawnee — devil — Potawatamy," came from Poll's cage, hanging near, and the highly-complexioned bird had introduced the next subject of general interest.

"Hullo, Poll," said Chumley, "you've learned a new word. No, Mr. Munro, but I've good reason to hope that he and his gang have moved away. All the horses are safer if it is so."

"Hope he's gone," said Uncle John, and it saved the rest from making further remarks while Chumley dismounted.

Poll alone persisted in repeating,—

"Potawatamy," and the syllables fitted his leathery throat precisely.

Mrs. Munro said quietly to Perry,—

"He's not going to tell all he knows. I can see that in his face. Maybe he will say more to you."

"I don't know whether I like him or not," said Perry. "Too bossy altogether."

The half-satirical smile of his mother expressed her comprehension of the fact that Chumley was not the only "positive character" at hand.

He had now come nearer, and she asked him,—

"Have you seen Red Beauty?"

"Early this morning, but I can't say where he is now. He brought the news from Jerry and sent a message to Miss Munro."

"What is it, Mr. Chumley?" Jessie had joined them just in time to get the Potawatamy's queer prophecy, faithfully, word for word. Before she had fully recovered from the assurance that she would some day be stolen by the Pawnees, and while she was considering what to say, the messenger himself managed to bury the whole subject in some remarks to Perry about farming affairs, including prairie hay and ploughing.

Gustav arrived, and Mrs. Munro walked away to hear what he proposed to do with the patent house, just as Perry responded to some suggestions relating to live-stock:

"That's all very well, but what's the use of raising horses and mules to have them run off by thieves? You couldn't even sell the hay after they were gone."

"I've been looking out for that," said Chumley. "I've promised Red Beauty to feed him all next winter if he'll scout around between this settlement and any molestation. Never mind about that blanket business. Treat him well."

"But can you trust him?" said Perry, thoughtfully. "He's an Indian."

"You mean that he will lie and steal? Well, he will and he won't. He's an old scalper, and you mustn't ask too much of him. I've known him a long time. One thing in him you can trust,—he hates a Pawnee, and he believes Jerry McCord intends to have him killed. Besides, he is fond of tobacco, and will keep on good terms with my caddy-full."

"He ought to be a good scout."

"I don't mind telling you and Miss Munro. He was actually in Jerry McCord's camp before sunrise this morning. He found that it had been abandoned last evening. That's one reason I'm here to-day and not away raising a squad of men to clear out the gang."

"Mr. Chumley," said Jessie, "will you tell us, frankly, is there any real danger?"

"I think not. Surely not so much as formerly. Five men are safer than two. When I came here, four years ago, the cavalry had to do some pretty sharp work."

Jessie colored deeply as she responded,—

"Red Beauty said you killed a man and scalped him and buried him under Chumley's Post."

She was looking him in the face as if she more than half believed it, and what she saw there astonished her, so strong a shudder went over him and so sudden a whiteness came under the healthy bronze.

"You must have misunderstood him, Miss Munro, but the truth of that matter is no secret. Ask Erica. Now you've heard part, you may as well know all. I did not scalp anybody, but Chumley's Post is a sort of tombstone. There's a graveyard all along the Pawnee Trail."

"How was it?" asked Perry, bluntly.

"Let Gustav tell all he knows, or Mrs. Eagleson. I'd rather not say much."

"Was it so very terrible?" said Jessie.

"Did they tell you about the grove and the spring, where their house is to be built?"

"I'm going over there with Erica as soon as I have time."

"She may tell you how it was when you get there. I had to carry, with a horse to help me, out of that grove to the hole I dug at the Post five dead bodies, all scalped and bloody. Now, is that a pleasant thing to remember? I've seen a scalping-knife lifted over Erica's head. Jerry McCord killed one of the very dogs that saved her. I've seen Mrs. Eagleson wrestling with a Pawnee

while her husband was being murdered before her eyes."

"He wasn't murdered!" exclaimed Jessie.

"It was near enough. But I'd as lief not talk about it just now. It was the very last thing of the kind in this region. They were in camp and I'd just got here. All would be peaceful enough but for such white devils as Jerry McCord."

His desire to change the subject was strongly evident, and the deep feeling of respect for him which grew upon them rapidly was aided by his refusal to recite exploits of his own doing.

"I'm almost sorry we came," said Jessie, with a half shiver.

"No need of that," replied he. "The village you came from was Indian ground once. Perhaps there are Jerry McCords in it now. You'd never know them. I must be off."

"Didn't you mean to stay and keep us company to-day?" said Perry.

"I'm not needed. I wanted to tell you the news and make sure you were coming to supper. Mrs. Eagleson and Erica are making preparations."

He had a knack for getting away from disagreeable subjects, and he did not mean to face Mrs. Munro and her husband and Uncle John upon the history of the graveyard at the Post. His movements were more brisk than usual until he was once more on horseback.

"Jessie," said Perry, "I wonder what on earth is the matter with that fellow? He's no common sort of man."

"He doesn't look exactly like a bad man."

"Guess he can shoot straight. I'll be good to Red Beauty. I want to hear his part of that story. Five dead bodies! Must have been an awful fight. I believe I could——"

"Nonsense, Perry!" she exclaimed, as he hesitated. "You don't need to kill anybody."

Nevertheless her sisterly eyes admired his stalwart proportions and resolute face none the less because they made her also "believe that he could," in case of need. Curiously enough, however, there came between his face and hers a flashing memory of the day before,—of two men facing each other. One held a derringer pistol, into the muzzle of which the other looked, and Jessie understood that even the outlaw had not been "cowed." He had ridden away from certain death, but would have preferred fighting if any chance had been given him. She was learning some things about men and manhood which she had never even thought of up to that hour. She had no time for much dreaming before Perry said,—

"Whatever else I do I'm going to practise rifle-shooting. Yes, and every other kind of shooting——"

"So will I," interrupted Jessie.

"Father can hardly use a gun, and Uncle John 'll never kill anybody unless he does it professionally."

"I could learn to shoot as well as any man, I know I could."

"Of course. It's easy enough. But we must ask Gustav about the fight in the grove."

It was dinner-time before he gave them an opportunity to do that, and then they were disappointed. Either he could not, or believed Chumley wished him not to do so, and all they obtained was an assurance that he was stabbed with a knife and knocked down with a club and did not kill anybody or know anything of what was done.

"Chumley put me in wagon and bring me away. I get well. Then I get mad when he pay me for work. I do something for that man some day."

CHAPTER XXI.

SUPPER AT CHUMLEY'S.

CHUMLEY was in no apparent hurry to reach his own house. He seemed even willing to ride to the woods and back, along the Trail, as if he needed to do some thinking in the saddle. He brought his horse to a walk as he wheeled out of the tree-shadows to return, and there was a pained, doubtful look upon his face.

"Women," he said to himself, "have curious notions about such matters. I've known women who would have called it murder. What is it to me, anyhow? No, all that is too late now. It would be if she were ten times more beautiful. Besides, women go for handsome men. Fellows like Jerry McCord. Or for rank and station and titles and big incomes. Don't I know? I've had my lesson. No more gall and wormwood for me. I've had enough."

There must have been some in his mouth at that moment, if a just opinion could be based upon its bitter expression. He said something more about the graveyard at the Post and about the story Jessie would hear from Erica, and about his murdered

dogs and their value as compared with Jerry McCord, and then he rode slowly on homeward.

There was more than usual activity in Chumley's kitchen that morning, for Erica and her mother expected critical eyes to look upon their housekeeping, and their pride applied spurs. The whole house had so particular a look before dinner-time that Red Beauty refused to smoke in it, and took his continuous pipe out of doors. He knew that there was a feast coming. The table for supper would surely be set without his assistance, but no consideration would have prevented him from remaining to see how it would look. He was also aware that a mysterious amount of pale-face cookery was going forward, taxing to the uttermost the resources of the kitchen stove. He had himself contributed some prairie-chickens, and Chumley had added some quail, although it was not yet "the season" for either. The old Indian knew what these were for, but he could not guess what the two white squaws were doing with so much flour and water and fire and all the odd materials that were on the table. There were hiding-places he had not thought of in and under that house, and out of these, that afternoon, came crockery and table furniture which had waited long for "company." Some of it suggested prosperity quite pointedly, but the two women were hardly prepared for another suggestion that was at last made.

Red Beauty followed Chumley into the house while they were setting the table and pointed at it.

"Ugh! Good!" said he. "Where Chumley 'teal 'em all?"

"Found them," laughed Chumley. "Got them of some Potawatamies."

"Ugh! Young black eye squaw come. See table. Say Chumley 'teal a heap."

"I hope they will come," said Chumley. "If I stay here, I'll have the right kind of house, some day, and of dinner-table. If the railway comes, and markets, and I can get all my land under cultivation."

He did not say that directly to the Indian, and received only "Ugh!" for answer, but there was something stirring him up. He was, just then, looking forward for the very "civilization" whose arrival he had hitherto dreaded. He also appeared to sympathize with Mrs. Eagleson's housewifely anxiety concerning the success of what Red Beauty called his "heap eat."

There was no doubt as to the coming of the Munro family. One and all they had become infected by a strong curiosity concerning their neighbor and his possessions.

Uncle John, in particular, had been dwelling upon what he had heard and seen until some of his ideas tripped each other up and impelled him to say to his brother, but in the hearing of all,—

"No doubt Payne is a horse-thief, and I'm sorry for him, but it is plain to me that Chumley is jealous of him. Payne is by all odds the better-looking man of the two, but the Eagleson girl should have some common sense. Now Payne is driven off there will be nobody in Chumley's way, and I'm glad of it."

Uncle John often said funny things, but he had rarely been rewarded with more laughter than replied to all that wisdom.

Jessie laughed without knowing why, and noticed that Perry laughed very hard indeed and seemed to do so with an especial effort. She did not give Uncle John an opportunity for further improvement of his text, but remarked to her mother,—

"It's about time for us to go. Shall we ride or walk?"

"Walk, of course," exclaimed Perry. "Who wants a horse for such a distance?"

Walk they did, but when they reached the Pawnee Trail they found themselves waited for. It was Red Beauty's first meeting with Perry since the affair with Bob and the blanket, but the old Indian's dignified "How" evinced no disturbing memory of any such trivial incident. He spoke to each in turn with a shake of the hand as if he were their host, bidding them welcome. Then he waved his hand southerly, remarking,—

"Chumley land. Long walk."

"He has more of it fenced in than I thought for, father," said Perry. "Corn, oats, clover, vines, young orchard, pasture-land. It's all one man need care for."

"He spoke of selling out and moving farther west, Perry."

"Ugh!" exclaimed the old Indian. "No go. All Munro come. Chumley stay now. Heap land, water, tree, house, no go. Yellow-hair land away there. Black-hair land there. Two young squaw come to Chumley Post some day, fight hard, say 'no come on my land.' All that land Chumley land. Way off. Own tree. Own hill. Own prairie Long time ago, Indian own 'em all."

"I suppose that's so," said Jessie; but he had more to say on the land question.

"Red Beauty hear big heap preach one time. Know what come some day. All Indian come back. Own all land again. Potawatamy come. Pawnee come. Potawatamy kill him. Sioux come. All tribe come. White man all go. Plenty buffalo then. No more heap devil."

It was not exactly clear what he had or had not heard from some Agency missionary, but he evidently believed himself uttering sound doctrine.

At some untellable future time the red men were to have their own again and a little more, with plenty of game and no pale-face interlopers. The expression of his own face when he mentioned the

Pawnees was a suggestion of some things which might occur in the "Happy Hunting-Grounds" in the absence of United States cavalry, but no argument was attempted by his hearers, and they walked on with him towards the house.

As they drew near and saw its owner standing in the door-way Red Beauty asked of Mrs. Munro,—

"Two young white squaw. S'pose Red Beauty take one,—Jerry McCord one,—what Chumley do?"

It was an embarrassing conundrum, but he had more in him, for now he pointed from Jessie to her brother with,—

"Nobody give pony for white squaw. Boy get pony, by and by. Go get one, two, four Pawnee squaw. Give pony for 'em. Bring 'em home. Say old woman no more work. Got squaw for do work now. Sit still in house."

All could laugh at that except Red Beauty, although Mrs. Munro had never before been called an old woman. Her healthy cheeks looked even healthier, however, over the idea of Perry's four Pawnee wives doing her housework for her.

"Go in house," said Red Beauty. "See table. Yellow-hair work all day. Fix heap for boy. Boy look at yellow-hair and break plate."

At that moment Chumley's own welcome helped Perry decidedly, and the quizzical old savage did not have another chance for rude fun for some time. His next came in a general pause after the greetings

of the ladies, old and young, had been exchanged, and while the eyes of the visitors were making inquiries.

"Look!" he said to Uncle John, pointing around. "All door in house open. 'Teal anything John like."

It had not been so when he was left as garrison of the house, and now, while Mrs. Eagleson returned to the kitchen, Erica showed Jessie and her mother every room but Mr. Chumley's own. At the door of that she paused, saying whose it was, and they had but a glimpse of its interior, although Chumley had led the men through it on their way to examine the stable.

They saw much in that one glimpse, and their neighbor was more an object of curiosity than ever.

"Now," said Erica, "if you will be seated, I must go and help mother."

So she did, and Perry Munro re-entered the dining-room in time to hear his mother whisper,—

"Jessie, you never can tell. Uncle John may be right. She is young yet, but she would look splendidly as lady of the house."

"She is tall for her age," said Jessie, and at that moment they heard Uncle John remark, coming through Chumley's bedroom,—

"Joseph, do you suppose you have forgotten how to fiddle? I'm glad Mr. Chumley has one. A horn, too. Do you sing, Mr. Chumley?"

"I think I can safely leave that to the ladies,"

he replied, but Uncle John was fond of music and continued,—

"I should be glad to hear you after supper. You could accompany yourself on the horn."

"Hardly," said Chumley, and the laugh stirred up by Uncle John seemed to do him good. It brought into his eyes the first twinkle of out and out fun Jessie had seen there.

Supper was ready now. Red Beauty drew up a chair, but before sitting down he pointed gravely to one article after another and asserted,—

"Chumley great brave. 'Teal a heap. Hide all 'calp take and say 'Chumley good man.' Heap lie."

His host knew him perfectly well, and responded to the ladies,—

"When Red Beauty was in his prime, his reputation stood very high. He was called the best horse-thief in his tribe."

"Red Beauty great chief!" was the prompt acceptance of that bit of glory. "Good Indian. Take 'calp. 'Teal horse. Have heap squaw. Heap pony. All gone now."

There was enough of pathos in the slow utterance of the last words to prevent a laugh over his picture of a good Indian, and they all sat down to thoroughly enjoy a capital supper. Perry Munro sat where he could see the "shot-hole" in the front door, however, and before supper was over he had heard Red Beauty vividly explain why it was there.

CHAPTER XXII.

ONE SECRET TOLD.

Two separate commanders of mounted Pawnee-hunters ordered a halt at about the middle of that afternoon.

The lieutenant who was searching for Jerry McCord and his runaways at the northward came to the bank of a river and could find no reason for crossing it. Neither was there any reason for following the bank of its winding channel either down or up.

"Leftenant," remarked the best scout he had, "this 'ere trail's busted."

"Seems to have petered out," remarked the officer, with a reddening face and a bead of perspiration on his forehead.

"Guess we're follerin' a wild-goose chase. There ain't no use in breakin' down another hoss. Thar's no track to go by. All the sign we had is used up."

"That's so," said his beaten commander. "Boys, it's 'bout face. We've missed catching Jerry McCord this time."

"About face" it was, and there were many weary and dejected miles of hot-weather riding before them, on their return to report failure.

It is part of the continual life and duty of United States troops acting as police in the Indian country.

Far away to the southward, the other squad of men in blue also drew rein while their captain wiped his face also and studied the situation. He had scouts and he had trailers, but his orderly sergeant was his prevailing counsellor, and now the sergeant spoke:

"I'd say go west for a couple of days. Some of them ranch men buy hosses of him, they say, and we may get a hint of some sort."

"Not from the men he deals with," said the captain, shaking his head.

"There's always some fellow 'round a ranch that'll sell his soul for five dollars or a plug of terbaccer."

"All right. We won't go south another mile, anyhow. If nothing turns up we can try back along the Trail clean through the hills."

No river had stopped them. Only some old ruts and a buffalo-path, beyond which they did not care to go. Their camp that night was some miles nearer sunset, and just as many farther away from the camp of Jerry McCord's Pawnees. In this latter hiding-place, however, there was at that hour no Jerry. The plans with which his heated brain was teeming had carried him away, no man knew exactly whither.

The cavalry squads were not alone in their delays and defeats.

Perry and Jessie Munro felt that it would be out of order for them to ask questions concerning local history of either Erica or her mother in Chumley's presence. The very perfection with which he performed his duty as host compelled a postponement of their curiosity, although the contents of his house, particularly of his bedroom, had stirred it to undue activity.

Not until the darkness had settled over the prairie did Chumley's guests depart, and he went with them mainly because Erica insisted on a walk with Jessie. It seemed a matter of course that Perry should be with them, and Chumley made it appear unavoidable that he should go on in advance with Mrs. Munro and her husband and Uncle John.

Hardly were the three young people out of hearing of the others before Jessie's long pent-up inquiry burst forth.

"Erica," she exclaimed, "Mr. Chumley tells us you were almost scalped once. His dogs saved you."

"Dogs? Yes, the dogs pulled down the Pawnee, but it was Red Beauty killed him. Scalped him, too. He shot one more. Mr. Chumley killed all the rest. Oh, it was so terrible! He was splendid!"

"He did not scalp them?" was Jessie's confused

exclamation, and Erica turned upon her indignantly:

"He? Mr. Chumley? You don't know how brave he is. He was all alone. There were five Pawnees. He rode right in. I was a little girl, but I see him now on his great horse that reared so when he fired his rifle. They went down and rolled and struggled on the grass, and Red Beauty came out of the bushes. That's why he does as he pleases at our house. Says anything. Nobody cares what he says. He shot the Pawnee that took hold of mother."

The Potawatamy's freedom of speech and action was accounted for, and Erica's indignation was much appeased by Perry's enthusiastic declaration,—

"Chumley was grand! Tell us all about it. He said you would. He told us a little and wouldn't say any more."

Erica had enough to say now, and the skirmish by the spring lost very little of its weird interest in her narration. Perry felt that Chumley would never again be the same man to him, but his sister was conscious of a strong sense of repugnance which did not spring altogether from the mere idea of bloodshed. One man against five was magnificent, but one man burying five was grisly and horrible. She shuddered as she thought of the scalped and bloody corpses and the awful courage

and nerve of the unflinching sexton by whose own hand three of them had fallen.

Erica's account had been given with all the rapidity of intense earnestness, and did but last until the Pawnee Trail was reached and the older people waited there for the younger.

The good-nights were exchanged all around, and then Perry once more saw Erica take Chumley's arm and walk away homeward, while Jessie remarked in his ear,—

"See that, Perry? It's no wonder she should think so much of him. He saved all their lives."

"I wish I'd been there."

"He didn't need any other help but Red Beauty. I shall treat him better after this."

"Mother and father and Uncle John must know all about it," said he, and that was the key-note of a talk which lasted long after they reached their own camp. Very nearly the last strong point of it was made by Uncle John, when he said,—

"I do not at all understand the operation of taking a scalp. I must get Red Beauty to explain it to me."

"Uncle John," said Perry, "good-night. I hope you will never be called upon to perform that operation upon anybody in this settlement."

It was bedtime, but it was hardly sleep-time, and even Perry finally dropped off in the midst of an effort to imagine the sound and effect of an Indian

war-whoop. No sleeper in either of the two households dreamed who had or had not passed along the old highway of the bisons before the sun rose, but Jessie awoke with an instantaneous recalling of the story she had heard the evening before, and it seemed as if she had but one thing to do that morning.

"Perry," she said, "I'm going to ride over after breakfast and get Erica, and make her go and show me that place. Will you go?"

"Where the fight was? No, I can't quit work for an hour. I'll see it some other time."

She was vaguely glad of that answer, and did not guess how glad he was to have work to plead as an excuse for not seeing Erica Eagleson that morning. At least, not at Chumley's house, and then to see him come with her as a matter of course. He overstrained the unpleasant idea a little, for that was what Chumley did not do. Jessie rode over and her approach was seen, and Erica awaited her at the gate with a smiling welcome, but no Chumley made his appearance. As Erica quickly explained for him,—

"He is out in the woods beyond your land, picking out trees for logs for your house. Father 'll be ready to go at them to-morrow."

Jessie expressed strongly her sense of such neighborly kindness, and her invitation for a ride sent Erica away in haste for her horse.

She led out a very pretty animal, and replied to Jessie's admiration of it with,—

"She is so gentle, too. She will follow me anywhere. Mr. Chumley trained her himself before he gave her to me. He knows more about horses than anybody else does. He is splendid!"

"You've a perfect right to think so," laughed Jessie, and if her words meant any more than "because he killed those Pawnees," Erica answered that meaning with enthusiasm,—

"I'll take you right there, and you'll see how it was. It's a beautiful place, too, and we're going to build our house there."

She was in the saddle as a bird alighting, and in another moment they were racing away, side by side, along the Trail. They pulled up when they came to the Post, and Jessie remarked,—

"I see no trace of any graves."

"Mr. Chumley says he took care to prevent that. None of the other Pawnees know what became of these. He said I might ask you to say nothing about it to anybody. They might come for revenge, and he means to speak to Mr. Munro."

The grass was level there, and they rode on towards the grove where the Eagleson family had been "trapped."

There was a trap there now. Among the thick bushes a horse was hidden, and by him stood a man dressed in a neat suit of black. He looked

even more gentlemanly and business-like in that than in blue, for he was saying to himself,—

"The fact that I can ride right into a settlement and keep a bank account shows that I am correct. I can drop Jerry McCord at any time, and nobody can prove one thing against Edward Payne."

Vicious self-indulgence can obtain the keenest possible idea of the uses of money, while such a life as he was then leading offered few opportunities for squandering ill-gotten gains. There was nothing exceptional in the fact that he had found a suitable place of deposit for all of these against the time when he should need them. He knew the ways of the world and of its business, and the nearest "National Bank" was but two days' hard riding distance northeasterly, wild and thinly settled as was the region around Chumley's Post.

There had been no immediate need for resting his horse in that grove, but there he was. He had no knowledge of its history, nor any small hope that any face he wished to see would be drawn to it, but the growing power of his wild passion had kept him there, for three long hours, brooding with a burning bitterness over the fact that he could not hope for a favorable reception at the Munro camp.

Now, as he looked out over the grassy slopes beyond, almost choking with wrath yet nearly ready for departure, he saw what led him to hide both himself and his horse more carefully.

"Both of them? Oh, if it were Jessie only. Why did they both come? Now I cannot speak to either, unless they wander in here; I could not help it, then."

If he had not been deeply, genuinely in love, after his kind, his vanity might have led him into some imprudence. He saw the two girls ride in, and their unchecked conversation fully explained for what cause they were there. Erica pointed out minutely the topography of her terrible adventure. There stood the wagon, and by it she had seen her father fall. There her mother struggled with the Pawnee who came to kill her. Out of those bushes glided Red Beauty.

"I was standing right here, Jessie, when the Indian took both braids of my hair in his hand. Mr. Chumley's hound caught him by the wrist of the other hand that had a knife in it. The other hound took him by the throat. Then I saw Mr. Chumley among the trees, there, on horseback, and they all went down, one after another."

She had more to tell, and Jessie had questions to ask, never dreaming that a listener in the bushes said to himself, in astonishment,—

"They told me about the strange disappearance of those five braves. Now I can tell them where they all went to. Buried by the Post, are they? No need for me to touch Chumley now. The whole band 'll attend to his business. It's worth a great

deal to me. But oh, how wonderfully beautiful she is! I thought Erica was the loveliest being on earth till I saw her. I'm willing to settle down, even, for her sake."

He said it as if he were describing the last sacrifice which man could make for the love of woman, just as Jessie exclaimed,—

"Come, Erica. I want to get away. It's a dreadful place. Tell me the rest as we ride along."

"There isn't any more to tell," said Erica, as they wheeled and rode out of the grove. Little she imagined how very much she had already told or to whom she had told it. The moment they were out of sight, a man on horseback galloped away in an opposite direction, and he carried in his head and heart a new and deadly peril to the man who had so boldly rescued the Swedish immigrants from the Pawnee trap long years ago.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MUCH SUSPECTED LEADER.

THE broad acres of the Munro "section" found their western boundary-line a quarter of a mile deep among the trees of the forest, and Chumley was now walking slowly from trunk to trunk of his neighbor's best timber. He had an axe in his hand, and every now and then he cut a chip from a tree of nearly a certain girth, remarking, "That will do for one more."

He was marking trees to build log walls with, and he was thinking of the people who were to live within the walls so to be builded.

"Seems to me," he said, "as if I'd known them for years instead of days. I don't know if I'm exactly fair with Jessie. I hate to do it, but I will, as soon as I get to the house."

All that was a riddle until he had finished his self-appointed task and had walked slowly and moodily to his own home and room. He closed the door behind him and stood for a moment before his writing-desk as if irresolute.

"It's there," he said, "but it is full five years since I have looked at it. I think it would be fifty

more before I should wish to see it or its original if it were not for Jessie Munro's face."

A key was put into the lock and a lid was lowered. Then another key went into the lock of a drawer, and a little velvet case was in his hand. He held it for a full minute before he touched the spring and it flew open. His lips came together very tightly and his forehead showed its furrows at their deepest, but he looked long and intently before he said, aloud,—

"I see more than I ever did before. I was not mistaken as to their being counterparts, but the camera will not lie. I could not read her living face then as I can her photograph now, or I should not have been made such a fool of. How easily a man can throw his life away! No wonder I cared little how I risked mine after that. It was hardly worth saving. Jessie Munro doesn't guess what it cost me to be neighborly to her. What is it, now, in this picture, that no photograph of her would show? It's a deep study."

So he seemed to find it, until he closed the case and put it away. Even then he walked out into the open air with a preoccupied look upon his face which did not disappear until two young women on horseback came racing to the very gate.

"Good-morning, Mr. Chumley," said Jessie, cheerily. "I've brought her safe home again. We've been to the scene of your exploit."

"I told her all about it," said Erica, "and she agrees with me."

"Will you dismount and walk in, Miss Munro?" said Chumley.

"I must hurry home, thank you."

"Don't let that dismal story give you wrong notions about danger. It was a rare case then, and four years have worked improvements."

"And there are fewer Indians and more white people. I wish there were thousands coming right along."

"They will come."

He was opening the gate, but Erica was already on the ground without help and led her horse in, while Jessie seemed averse to further conversation. She herself could hardly have explained how strongly or why, and she rode away as if in fear of being too late for something or other. She had much to relate to her mother when she reached the patent house, in which a small cook-stove was already at work, but among her first sayings was,—

"Mother, it did seem to me as if I could not speak about it to Mr. Chumley. There he stood, by the gate, and I suppose I ought to have complimented him."

"Leave all that to Erica, my dear. It's an old story to him."

Chumley was receiving unknown compliments at that hour, for Jerry McCord, as he galloped

along across prairie, on an errand whose direction he alone knew, expressed himself with great energy as to the prowess described in his hearing by Erica.

Few men were better qualified to form an opinion, and his respect for Chumley was all the greater because of Erica's neglect to state that not one of the slain braves carried a revolver. Jerry had taken the pistols for granted. He had left behind him a lot of precisely such Pawnees, and there was no immediate danger that any destroying horseman would ride rashly into their camp.

There they were, all that day, with the exception of a few who were lazily looking for the game they were sure of finding. The kind of life they led required little effort to sustain it, and they were the most completely at their ease of all the inhabitants of that region. They were sure of being maintained at public cost whenever they might choose to be captured and taken to the Reservation. Meantime they had no need for even such pleasant work as thieving, and were quite willing to lie around listlessly day after day, waiting the return of the white man whose busy brain devised their more profitable excitements.

They were not to be stirred up by him for several days. He camped on the prairie that first night, as much at home there as any Indian.

The sloughs and streams were running low at that season, and he seemed to know the best fords.

One more night came, but he passed it in a settler's cabin, and at noon of the third day he rode leisurely into a railway town and dismounted before a building over the door of which the sign read "First National Bank."

It was the first of its kind in that place, and it might be long before another would be needed, but there was an air of solid respectability about it. So there was about the old gentleman in the president's room, who welcomed Jerry McCord as his well-known depositor, Mr. Edward Payne.

"Come to draw on us for some more purchases, Mr. Payne?"

"Not exactly. I've sold to very good advantage this last trip. I've got something to leave with you for a while, but my next purchases will be lands. I'm out of the cattle trade."

"Going to farm it, eh? Going to get a wife and settle down. That's a good idea. Which do you mean to pick out first, wife or land?"

"Guess I've looked around enough now, Mr. Bunker," laughed Jerry, and there was a dignifiedly merry exchange of worldly wisdom between them concerning land speculations, cattle-raising, pork, and railway improvements. The depositor declared himself in some haste to get away at last.

"Waiting for you, is she?" said Mr. Bunker. "Well, give her my compliments, and tell her she

has caught the man who can write the neatest signature on my books."

There was no occasion to write it now, and the banker gave his customer no slightest sign of any further interest in him than belonged to the fact that he kept his money in that institution. The cashier and the teller were equally polite and noncommittal, and it was not until Jerry had mounted and ridden away that Mr. Bunker, standing behind the counter, remarked to both of them,—

"Gentlemen, it's none of our business. I suppose our vaults are actually safer with a good deal of money in them belonging to that kind of men. Nobody can forge his signature."

"I'd hardly feel so safe about him and another man's," dryly responded the cashier. "Queer we can find out nothing whatever about him. He's a king-pin somewhere."

"I know a town in Illinois," said Mr. Bunker, "that never had a horse stolen within twenty miles of it. Some of its well-to-do citizens never operated too near home."

"We are all right, then, on that theory. At all events I don't care to make an enemy of Mr. Edward Payne."

They were cautious men, clear-headed, careful of their own interests, and they did not say too much, even to each other. Nevertheless it was made plain that the regular cattle dealers and traders of that

border were well known to them, and that from these very men they had learned that no "Edward Payne" bought and sold in their fraternity. The bank president went back into his room and sat down, with a cloud of thought upon his respectable face.

"I don't care to know too much," he said to himself. "He is not the only odd stick on our list. Liquor-men, gamblers, sports,—well, money is money. He answers the description perfectly. Almost too well. It seems impossible,—so well-bred,—so fine looking,—and yet he may be Jerry McCord for all that."

Concealment is less easy, anywhere, after a man's deeds have earned for him a name and fame, and Jerry was probably unaware how good a "description" of him was in circulation.

"I can bring Jessie right here," he said, as he rode along, on his return. "We can make a tour East. I've money enough to do it in style. I'd like to show her to one lot of people in New York, but that would hardly do. There is a chapter there she must never open. I'd shoot man or woman that told her about Sing Sing. It isn't like these matters here."

No romance of the border could beautify a convict's striped suit or light up the cell of a felon, and he was aware that women had prejudices.

Jessie had, but all the ideas of human life to

which she had been educated were undergoing a change. Jerry himself might have been gratified if he had known how often her thoughts reverted to him during those days, or how feverishly she studied and re-studied all she could remember of his face. He was a mystery to her, a riddle she could not solve, and in all her pure mind there was not enough knowledge of evil to interpret him as a revelation of cultivated human depravity.

"I do not wonder," she said to her mother, "that he fell in love with so beautiful a girl as Erica."

"I think Mr. Chumley is quite able to protect her, my dear, unless too many Pawnees come at once."

"He does not believe they will ever come, but we must keep that old matter secret."

"Certainly, Jessie, and I hope Erica will come over often. It isn't so easy for us to go there."

She did not say why, but it was precisely so, and Jessie's answer took it for granted when she said,—

"I wish she would come every day."

It was a wish that seemed likely to be gratified, at least so long as Erica's father was at work among Mr. Munro's logs, and there was one unaccountable feature about her coming and going. Chumley also came frequently, on foot or on horseback, but in either mode he was sure to come alone and to go away early. Upon Perry therefore fell a social duty he did not fail to perform. He accompanied

Erica home invariably, to be forced by Mrs. Eagleson to stay to supper. Just as invariably he came away more deeply convinced that Erica was the most beautiful girl on earth, and that Uncle John was right when he said,—

"I don't know what to make of Chumley. He is a very remarkable character."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

The summer days went by, one by one, till there came a peculiarly hot and sultry noon, under whose blaze a six-mule team with an army wagon behind them halted wearily at about the point where the captain and his men turned westward along the Pawnee Trail, to hunt for Jerry McCord in the wrong direction.

A mounted man not in uniform drew rein at the side of the wagon, and to him the teamster remarked,—

"Quartermaster, we're on time, and we haven't any waitin' to do."

"No, sir-ree. There they come, and they haven't

fetched along any Pawnees. Jerry's ahead of 'em yet."

"Reckon he's likely to be."

It was true enough. The captain and his men were even then in sight. Half an hour later he was reading a despatch from his commander, handed him by the quartermaster.

"Supplies, eh? And the lieutenant has failed, and I'm to keep up the search in this direction till I find 'em and bring 'em in. Quartermaster, the nearest water is down the Trail a mile. We'll camp there to-night. We'll push eastward in the morning."

There was a strong contrast between the arid level where the cavalry met their supplies and the comparatively cool, delicious shade of the wooded valley where Jerry McCord rode in, at that same mid-day, to be swarmed around by his uncomely followers.

The cavalry captain received little news besides his orders, but the red men learned something altogether new before Jerry McCord completed his report. So far as they were given to understand, he had been upon a prolonged "scout," devoted to their peculiar interests, and in the course of it he had solved a mystery for them. They knew now what Chumley and Red Beauty had done for their five missing warriors, four years since, and where the lost braves were buried. Thenceforth some-

thing stronger than Chumley's best horses was likely to draw them after Jerry in any plan he might make relating to his private loves and revenges.

He had plans, moulded in the red heat of his disturbed, disorderly soul, through all the long miles of his return ride. This preparation of the dire hatred of his band for Chumley was a needful beginning, that he might have their more perfect acquiescence, in the absence of trustworthy rule or discipline. All the fire within him, however, forbade his lingering in that hiding-place one hour longer than was absolutely necessary, and he announced an immediate departure upon another errand in the neighborhood of Chumley's Post. He had passed it in the night prudently, with no better reminder of Jessie Munro than the deep-toned warning Bob had sent him through the dark for riding a little too near instead of keeping in the Trail.

Jerry had told his story well, and all his present explanations of purpose were listened to without a grunt of dissent, but he had talked to men who watched all other men habitually. There was something in his manner they did not understand, save that it indicated something upon his mind which he had hidden from them. Their nature and their way of life had made them all one tinder of suspicion, and it needed but a spark to kindle

it. The swift thoughts in their hearts went round from group to group among them while Jerry ate his dinner and during the long nap his weariness made compulsory afterwards.

Suspicion stirred suspicion, and the hate he had kindled aided the process with subtle virulence. Before he was again awake, his Pawnees were in doubt if he had not known from the beginning all he now revealed concerning the graves at Chumley's Post. A story so improbable was of itself a suggestion that yet another hand had helped the Swedes besides those of Chumley and the old Potawatamy. Perhaps it was Jerry's own. Who could tell? How else did he really get hold of the facts so minutely? Chumley must be killed. Red Beauty must lose his scalp. No doubt was expressed upon those points from the first, but before the discussion was ended they had fully determined that their further dealings with Jerry McCord would depend upon the results of a close watch now to be kept upon all his motions. Even the slain sentry at the tree in the old camp was made use of to increase the general cloudiness of the situation. Prompt action followed, and a pair of the readiest and most excited braves caught their best ponies at once and galloped away eastward. They would be among the scenes of Jerry's proposed scout before he would, and they left behind them the entire gang doubly ready to follow,

whether he or they should send word, or even if none at all should be sent.

Jerry awoke at last, and the presence or absence of any two of his followers called for neither thought nor comment. He took a fresh horse, and a good one, but when he mounted him he wore his blue suit, with whatever the loose frock-coat might conceal, and carried a repeating rifle. The blanket rolled and strapped behind the saddle informed all observers that bivouacs might be before his return.

He had already received an account of all there had been to tell of the laziness transacted in his absence, and cared little for what else might take place until he should again be heard from. His departure was accompanied by no ceremonial whatever, save that an unanimous "Ugh!" was uttered as his horse bore him out of sight among the trees.

There had been no hint given him concerning the two embodiments of distrust who were already far in advance of him on the rugged road which led to Chumley's Post.

That pair of Pawnees had a hard ride before them, for they were under a necessity of not being caught up with, and they knew that Jerry McCord was a rapid traveller. They were well mounted, well armed, with something like Red Beauty's claim to be called good-looking, and they did not dismount and hunt a hiding-place among some bushes until utter darkness took possession of the country.

The first dawn of light, next morning, found the investigators debating the day's work before them as they ate their breakfast. They then pushed on again, as if with an idea that Jerry might be gaining upon them. With an eye to the fact that they were far away from the Reservation and did not wish to meet chance passengers, they kept away from the Trail as much as the nature of the ground it led through permitted. With a further eye to the vague errand of watchfulness before them, they divided their forces and the field of action as soon as they had passed one narrow gorge. The warrior who went into the woods at the left of the Trail looked suspiciously after his fellow, and wished that he could follow him unseen. The brave who wheeled to the right glanced back at his brother on the left with a perfect assurance that he was not to be trusted alone or to tell the truth when they two should meet again. This was to be at noon, at the point where the path to their former camp of hiding branched away from the Pawnee Trail. Firmly they had agreed upon such a result, but even the most positive contracts, made by the most honorable of thieves, are not always perfectly kept.

The warrior on the left had, in fact, a great mystery before him. He met not a living soul in the woods as he rode watchfully onward, and would have had nothing worth telling if he had met the other Pawnee at noon.

He was upon the spot himself at the hour, ready to say that he knew no more than in the morning, but his mate had not arrived. It was wearisome work to sit still upon a pony and wait, and so, after a little while, he rode back along the Trail to meet the belated comer or to find out why he did not come. A mile and a half of disappointment brought him to a discovery. He knew every hoof-mark of the pony ridden by that other Pawnee, and here they were, clearly marked upon soft ground and turning away towards the right. Evidently the rider had deemed it well to go deeper into the woods, and his red "brother in arms" followed the trail he had left. It was easy to do so, and before long it led, for some rods, close to the edge of a wide, perpendicular-sided ravine, cleft through the limestone to a depth of fifty or sixty feet by some ancient torrent now dwindled to a mere brook at the bottom.

"Ugh! What for?" asked the discontented pursuer as he pushed on, studying those hoof-marks. He had not noted them particularly up to a point at the head of the gully, and may have missed some of their indications, but here he paused, exclaiming again, "Ugh! What for?" as he sprang to the ground.

He did this because he saw that the other brave had done so there, and he stooped to examine tracks of human feet. They were so faint that a

white man's eyes would not have found them, but a closer look was followed by a loud exclamation, a whoop, and a bound upon his pony. The fierce gutturals of pure Pawnee that he uttered as he pushed forward contained a strange assertion: the foot which made those tracks was one he did not know, and only one pair had been near the solitary pony ridden by his comrade. Could it be possible that such a brave as he knew that brave to be could have been changed into another brave as he rode along? It was highly improbable, but the hoof-marks led on and on for a mile more, and then it was very difficult to suppress the whoop that struggled in the pursuer's throat.

There was the pony, neatly tied to a sapling, near the edge of a great, flat ledge of gray limestone, and not a human being was near him. It might be an ambush or it might not, and caution was employed in approaching the tethered pony.

It was all needless, for neither sight nor sound was added to the pony's own whinny, save that a well-known rifle lay upon the grass beside him. Not a solitary track of any human foot led away from the foot of that sapling. Could the pony have eaten his rider and then tied himself?

That also was highly improbable, and there was no hint to be had until a closer inspection of the animal himself set the long-suppressed whoop vigorously free.

There was blood on the bridle!

That was enough. One Pawnee and two ponies hurriedly left a place so full of mystery and possible peril, and they did not pause again until they had reached a secluded spot, deeply hidden among the crags of the hills, where a bewildered red wanderer could eat his dinner and smoke and wonder what had become of the ordinary course of human events.

CHAPTER XXV.

AMONG THE BUSHES.

Jerry McCord rode on towards the scene of his proposed undertaking with no idea whatever that he had scouts in advance. He was entirely possessed, moreover, that he could shape certain coming events to suit himself, and that men could be put aside and that woman's will could be made to yield to his own.

He had company. Company that seemed to converse with him, and which at times made him break out into dreadfully profane language. People seemed to come out of years long past and ride beside him, and some of their memorial suggestions made him squirm in the saddle. They may

have been, some of them pretty surely, such as he would not have wished to ride in any manner by the side of Jessie Munro, telling her what they knew of him.

That he also thought of her was evident, for her name burst from his lips with passionate vehemence more than once.

"They may have set her against me," he said, aloud. "I will fix all that. Mine she shall be!"

There had been much to set the mind of Jessie against the dashing, handsome stranger who had ridden with her along the Pawnee Trail. Nevertheless it might have stirred his vanity if he could have known how much and how inquiringly she had thought of him. Had she failed to do so she would have been more or less than human, since he had broken in upon her quiet life as a visible, tangible embodiment of an entirely different mode of existence. He represented to her surprised, confused perceptions every crude idea she had of the wild, the adventurous, reckless, perilous, violent, and she was not entirely able to associate him with crime because she knew nothing about crime. One day when she was riding with Erica and they met Red Beauty, they halted for a chat with him, only to be told by that grimly humorous old savage,—

"Ugh! Jerry McCord come for squaw some day. Bring Pawnee. Say want two squaw, same as other chief. Ugh!"

The grin with which his wide mouth drew out towards his ears as he looked at their reddening faces lost him their further conversation, for they lashed their horses and rode onward, leaving him to shake his head and chuckle,—

"Jerry McCord good-looking Pawnee. White squaw no like him. Hope Chumley kill him. Red Beauty make hole in him some day."

He was entirely correct in his prophecy about the intended coming of Jerry McCord, and its utterance added to the certainty that he would not be long absent from the thoughts of Jessie Munro. He and his Pawnees taken together made up for her a dim phantom of peril; a sort of shadow on the loveliness of that prairie and forest in the daytime and a reason for listening quickly to any growl or bark of Bob's after nightfall.

"Could it be," she asked herself at times, "that a man of Mr. Payne's appearance should be really such a monster of wickedness?"

Some light upon that question came to her from her memory of his face when he was looking into the muzzle of Chumley's derringer. She might have obtained more if she could have watched the same face as he rode along upon his present errand. He spent a night in the woods, as the brace of Pawnees had done, and the following forenoon found him in his old camp.

"It will do very well," he said, "if I have to

bring her here, but it would be better to go East at once."

That inspection made, he returned towards the Trail, and rode on under cover of the forest with a feverish flush of eager determination upon his face, and it became him well. As he went farther he paused from time to time and listened.

"No chopping," he muttered. "None of them at work in the timber. I'll hide my horse and scout along the edge of Chumley's woods."

So he did, passing on after he reached them from tree to tree in Indian style, without any peril of being seen from the house. He looked long and searchingly at it and its surroundings, shaking his clinched fist more than once, as if at the man whom he did not see. There was smoke rising from the chimney. Horses were feeding in the pasture-lot. All things indicated occupation, but no human being was visible.

"Now for Munro's," he exclaimed, but he redoubled his precautions as he turned in that direction. There was more likelihood of meeting some stray member of that family, simply because there was a larger number to stray. The trees and bushes enabled him to creep within a very convenient spying distance, and his exclamation of surprise was as if he had borrowed it of a Pawnee.

"Ugh! A house! Stable? Fence around them? How they have worked! And there's Perry Munro

and his oxen breaking prairie. Going to put in winter wheat, I suppose. They're bound to be a rich family at this rate. There's a hog-pen. That's Mr. Munro at work on the fence. If the doctor isn't helping him! I'd no idea he could be of any use."

The male members of the Munro family were all accounted for, and an immense amount of hard work by both men and women also accounted for the marvellous change in the appearance of that piece of prairie land.

Jerry might well repeat,—

"If they keep it up they'll be rich."

He added, inwardly, a thought that it would be a prosperous thing for him to reform into such a family, with a wife who would some day own half of that rapidly improving property. The kind of love he was affected with is apt to have such symptoms, no matter what may be its other accompaniments.

Jerry had found a good ambush in a mass of hazels, where his only companion was a rabbit, who believed himself also to be perfectly hidden.

The rabbit was entirely unable to read the meaning of a sudden change in the expression of the human face he was watching, or he would at once have known more than any other living rabbit. Jerry's glass enabled him to study with trying closeness a tiny drama which produced a tremen-

dous effect upon him. Both Jessie and Erica came out of the "patent" part of the house, and they were closely followed by Mrs. Munro. She too must have been interesting, as a woman who might some day be a mother-in-law, but Jerry's gaze was focalized upon the pair in front of her. He could be quite sure they were not talking of him, for they were laughing merrily, and Bob came up as if to ask what it was about. Mrs. Munro handed Erica a parcel, very much as if saying,—

"There, my dear, take that to your mother."

Erica took the parcel and walked away leisurely, while Perry Munro turned from his plough to wave his hat, and Uncle John dropped a fence rail on the toes of his brother Joseph.

Jessie turned and went back into the house with her mother, and her hidden observer lowered his "binocular" without uttering a sound. He had been spoken to again, but not by Remorse or Repentance; only by fierce, absorbing Passion, and mingled with the overmastering counsels of that voice had been utterances most searching and most galling. He stood there as a spy in a thicket; an outlaw; a branded man; an ex-convict; a felon once driven from the presence of those very women as unfit for their society; and these withering memories came to converse with him while he looked upon the radiant face of the girl he was in love with. They came to say to him, "It might

have been," and when he replied, with an oath, "It shall be," they pointed at the record of his evil life and asked him, "What about this? Will she not surely know some day?"

The strange perversity of blunted human nature enabled him to reply and to believe it, "She will not care after we are married. Any woman takes her husband's part."

Still, there was gall and wormwood in the social fact that he dared not walk on to the house and make a lover's visit to Jessie. He hardly sent a thought after Erica. He had only been in love with her for a few days, and all her beauty was nothing to him now. It was a marvel how thoroughly all the forces of his emotional nature had become concentrated upon one object, and there was no one to explain it to him.

It had an easy explanation. He had by no means lost the capacity for loving, and beyond a doubt he was in love as utterly as was at all possible for him. Jessie represented to him all his idea of womanhood, but that was not all. It was as if in her he saw the social standing, the honor, the entire world of human life and hope that he had thrown away, and as if in obtaining her he might regain it, in defiance of the laws which govern human events.

Otherwise, his mad vanity and self-worship told him he was a wronged, persecuted man, with a

vengeful right to destroy whatever or whoever might prevent. There was murder in his heart and in his face as he drew back among the hazels. The rabbit believed himself sought for and sprang away in needless haste, but Jerry followed him slowly, saying to himself,—

"I wonder if that old Potawatamy is around yet. He'd be in the way, if he is, and I must have him wiped out."

He hardly imagined how perfectly the "old Potawatamy" understood his relations to Pawnees in general, and to that lot of them in particular.

A good look at him, only a little while after Jerry had turned away from studying Chumley's house, might have conveyed valuable information.

Chumley had not been seen, simply because he was inside of the house, in his own room, sitting at his writing-desk as if writing a letter, with another letter open before him.

He had just said, seeming to read what he had written,—

"Many thanks for the draft, but my plans are undergoing a change. I do not say what they are, but——"

There he stopped, for he heard a sound in the other room.

"Ugh! House! Where Chumley?"

"Are you back again? Come in. What's up now?"

"What is it? Who?"

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Red Beauty stood in the door-way, having made his stealthy way in unseen, and the very dogs knew him so well that they made no fuss in broad daylight over his comings or goings. It might have been another thing after dark, for dogs have evening notions of their own. The old Indian did not seem to have changed a hair of his head or a stitch of his raiment, and his weird face had an absolutely wooden expression as he drew aside his blanket and took out something it had hidden.

Chumley was not so wooden, for he sprang to his feet exclaiming, almost excitedly,—

"What is it? Who?"

"Ugh! One more Pawnee. Red Beauty great chief. Find other one pretty soon. Good! Chumley keep eye open. Pawnee come."

"Where did it happen?"

"Ugh! Chumley ask too much question. Somebody ask him some day. He say 'Don't know.' Chumley heap fool. Not know how lie."

"I won't be fool enough to ask how you got that scalp, then. The blood on it is hardly dry yet. Does it mean danger coming?"

"One danger gone. See? Ugh! More come. Chumley 'calp loose now. Go off pretty soon. Keep eye open for knife."

That was a grisly warning, with a ghastly illustration, but there was wisdom in giving up the hopeless task of questioning Red Beauty. It was

really just as well not to know the particulars and incidents of an ancient feud among the unforgiving red men. Such feuds exist and always have been, from the oldest days of savage life. They are bloody types of the centuries-old hates between great nations of semi-civilized white men calling themselves also Christians and inventing wonderful engines for the better destruction of human life. Red Beauty was a secretly proud Indian that day, but Chumley made him go and hide that scalp away, somewhere, and wash his hands before he would give him anything to eat. He was rewarded by the renewed assertion,—

"Chumley heap fool. Jerry McCord 'calp him pretty soon. Red Beauty got ONE!"

He ate as a man with a clear conscience and who had had neither breakfast nor dinner that day, and was making up for both. His host said to himself,—

"I do believe he has earned it, but I wish I knew how near the living rascals were. Probably they will never know what has become of this one."

That was quite likely, but if they had been near enough to him, about an hour before noon of that day, they would have been able to explain the entire puzzle concerning the conduct of his pony. The Pawnee whom they were never to see again had turned to the right, just as the hoofmarks of his pony indicated, and had ridden slowly along till

he came to the border of the ravine. Just there a rifle cracked among the trees beyond him, and a bullet struck him so truly between the eyes that he fell to the earth without a sound or a struggle. In a moment more Red Beauty was kneeling at his side, remarking to him,—

"Ugh! Bad Pawnee. Know him long time. No more 'teal horse. No more kill Potawatamy."

In another moment the trophy had been taken and the body thrown over into the ravine. Every visible trace of the whole affair was patiently obliterated before Red Beauty left the spot. Even then his next errand was down into the ravine, to pile stones and brush over the ghastly remnant of humanity. After that he followed and caught the Pawnee's pony, mounted and rode to the place where he deemed it best to leave him. It was easy to tie him to the sapling, to climb from that to a larger tree, monkey-like, and to drop from an outreaching branch of that upon the flat ledge of rock whereon moccasins left no footprint for any eyes to follow.

As for the pony, Red Beauty gave him up with deep regret, but with an inward assurance that whoever was next found upon him would be inquired of concerning his late owner. He did only justice to the trailing capacity of his enemies, however, when he said,—

"Pawnee find him. Ask him, 'Where brave?'

Pony no tell. Brave gone. Devil got him. Pawnee take pony 'calp if want to. No find Red Beauty on wrong horse."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SCOUT IN THE DARK.

When Red Beauty entered Chumley's house, Erica was on a visit with Jessie, Gustav was in the forest getting out rails for the Munro fences, and his wife was in the cornfield. She returned with an apron-full of roasting-ears in time to make coffee for Red Beauty, but would hardly have poured it out so smilingly if she had known what work he had been at to give him such a voracious appetite. Still, to her at least, his killing of another Pawnee would not have been so dreadful a stain upon his private character. She had been very glad to hear the report of his rifle once, and could easily have forgiven him for using it in like manner again. Not a syllable did he breathe to her, however, about his latest exploit, and took to his pipe in silence after dinner.

Chumley brooded long and deeply over the news and its indications. He finished his letter and sat

down for another council with his thoughts, and before long he said to himself,—

"I think at least Perry should be told, but I dislike to alarm Jessie and her mother. I must go over there."

At that moment Red Beauty came gliding in to say,—

"Ugh! Go find more. Come tell what find."

"You're off on another scout, are you? That's right. Seems to me I'd like to know a little more."

"Ugh! Chumley shut mouth. Wait. Red Beauty got ONE. Find if any more in woods. Chumley keep eye open all time. Got four dog left."

There was some consolation in that, so far as night-watches were concerned, but something more than dogs could do might now be demanded.

The old Indian left the house and went away through the cornfields, hidden all the time from the eyes of any possible observer in the edge of the forest. No man could guess what direction he would take after disappearing in the tall, green luxuriance of the maize.

Chumley went out and took a look at his horses in the pasture-lot, but there seemed no immediate reason for bringing them in. Then he went back to his room and inspected his very good supply of arms and ammunition.

"I hope I shall not have to try my skill on any human being," he said to himself, "but Jerry and his gang must keep away. Their blood is on their own heads if they come prowling around here. No danger of Erica taking a fool's fancy for such a fellow, but I won't have her annoyed by him. Jessie?"

He paused there, for some sudden thought which he did not put into words brought a flash to his eye and made him half pick up a revolver. He drew back his hand more quietly and added, "My house is a sort of fort, and they would hardly think of an actual attack nowadays. Not unless they could creep in at night, like any other burglars. The Munros have two log rooms. Wish all the rest was up and finished. It will be before winter, no doubt, and all their stabling, but Bob is their best friend just now, so far as their horses are concerned. I'll wait till I see Red Beauty again before I say anything to Perry. If those outcasts really come around, they'll try for me, sure as you live. Better keep my eyes about me. Open prairie is safer for me than the timber."

If he was thinking of the Munro family, one part of it was also thinking and speaking of him.

Erica had done so while she was with them, and it may have been some idea she left behind her that caused Mrs. Munro to remark,—

"I'm older than you or Erica, Jessie. To my

mind Mr. Chumley wears a look, especially at times when he's not speaking, that makes me feel as if he'd seen trouble. He's a young man, my dear, and he hasn't gotten over it yet."

Jessie was silent for a moment and drew a long breath before asking,—

"What kind of trouble, mother?"

"Something pretty deep, I should say. We're getting well acquainted with him and he's been here a great deal, and yet he has never said one word about his family or friends, or the part of the country he came from."

Jessie had not failed to take note of such a fact as that and to wonder at it exceedingly, but all she now said was,—

"Home trouble, you mean, mother?"

"It is really not our business, my dear, except that he is our only near neighbor and I wish we knew more about him."

More was said, and all of it was as nothing compared with the unspoken thoughts of those two women, and both were aware of it.

The neighborhood was very small, and all the gossip was necessarily intensified by concentration.

Long before supper-time Mr. Munro and Uncle John ceased making fence because they had used up all the rails on hand, but Perry toiled away at his ploughing persistently.

"G'lang now!" he shouted to his oxen. "Seems

to me I'd like to see the whole prairie turned over before sundown."

If anything upon his mind were goading and driving him, he turned its inner operation to good practical account, externally, and the broad ribbons of sod curled over and lay down ready for the wheat that was to come.

Supper-time came at last, but nothing came with it or followed it to mark that day from other days until after the last traces of sunlight had vanished.

The first thing to occur after dark which was worth noting was not taken note of by anybody. Away beyond the brook running through the middle of the Munro "section" a man rode out of the forest in a northerly direction, remarking,—

"I'll make a long circuit, if it's only to kill time. Maybe I'll pick up something new."

Jerry already knew about the Munro improvements all that could be seen from the forest, and he was familiar enough with Chumley's place, but lurking under trees was wearisome work for a man who had so very much and of such a sort in his heart and brain. He was out on an all but aimless hunt, but he took precautions. He did not ride near enough to the house to announce his coming to the keen ears of Bob, but he might have ridden nearer without doing so, for Bob was just then in the stable with his master.

Perry's ploughing should have wearied him suf-

ficiently to keep him quietly at home that evening, but it had failed to do so. He could hardly have told what was the matter with him if he had been asked. Something was, and other members of the family had spoken of it.

Uncle John had gravely mentioned malaria, and had suggested quinine and five other remedies. Mrs. Munro had shaken her head dubiously in reply, and so had Jessie, and it was to the expression of their faces and not to Uncle John that Mr. Munro replied, sharply,—

"He may be lonely. Perhaps he is, but he is not discontented. Let him alone. I had just such turns when I was of his age. I got to writing poetry once, and it stuck to me for six months. He isn't as bad as that yet, by any means. Let him alone."

So they did, and when he said he guessed he would take a ride, nobody interfered or told him what an odd idea it was. Jessie was even more considerate, and said he had taken a night for it when the stars were splendid.

That was true, but it was dark enough on the prairie, in spite of all that the stars could do. A man on foot, or even a horse, could not be seen at twenty paces distance. That was the estimate made by Jerry McCord when he dismounted upon the Pawnee Trail, a little later, at a place on a line from the Munro house to Chumley's. He could see the

faint glimmer of a light in the latter, and he added a savage remark about dogs to the words, "All at home, I suppose. We shall hardly get at him there. I don't know why I should go any nearer, but I will."

There was a wide reach of untouched prairie grass between him and Chumley's nearest fence, and into this he rode on and dismounted. A lariat-peg stamped into the ground was left to hold his horse for him while he went nearer the house which contained Erica, and to the stables and yard wherein so many desirable horses and mules were gathered. He might have thought more graspingly of either at an earlier day, but his love for Erica had been driven out by a stronger passion, and he had not for years felt so little like taking another man's horses. He would have given more for a safe shot at Chumley just then than for the best animal owned by either of them.

The night was warm, and as the prowler drew stealthily nearer he saw that the door stood wide open. All of that household who were at home were too much at peace to be in fear, and they had no dream of prying eyes out there in the darkness.

Nearer drew the bitter-hearted spy, as near as he might without a certainty of rousing Chumley's dogs, and now a glass was helpful in bringing the interior of the house before him. The very lamp

upon the table seemed to send out a whiter and brighter glow because of what it shone upon.

Chumley was not there, and Gustav Eagleson was reading to his wife and daughter from a huge leather-bound volume with heavy brass clasps. It was some massive book that he had brought with him over sea from the fatherland of the Norseman.

Jerry McCord had never looked upon just such a scene before, and he gazed in silence till the reading ended and the reader and the listeners all knelt down.

"If that isn't awful!" burst hoarsely from the lips of the outlaw. "They're praying. They believe in God, and there isn't any."

He had hardly repeated the felon's creed when a trampling near him made him suddenly turn and then crouch low among the grass and weeds. He was not any too prompt, although the eyes which might have discovered him were otherwise intently occupied. Perilously near the crouching thief in the grass sat a man on horseback, gazing with absorbed earnestness upon the family group, the upturned bearded face of the father, the bowed head of the mother, and the golden hair of the daughter, upon which the light of the lamp streamed so joyously as if taking a pleasure in doing so.

Perry Munro had brought a double-barrelled gun with him, without any assignable reason whatever,

but he was not at all likely to look for any mark down there among the shadows. He looked until he saw what Jerry now could not see. All three there in the house arose and stood together between the table and the door, and in a moment even the prowler felt a thrill from head to foot. It seemed to him, just as it did to Perry, that he had never in his life heard music more wonderful than that Swedish evening hymn, sung by those voices. Had he been nearer he could not have understood the words, but it was all the same. Some subtle meaning in them floated out across the prairie and found him and went down into his darkened soul, searching for some memory to which it was akin, and it found one. That forgotten thing in Jerry's mind was very faint and formless, but enough of life was stirred in it to make it whisper to him,—

"If there is a place hereafter, where all is light and beauty and holiness and peace and wonderful song, you will never look into it except from some place reserved for evil beings, away outside, in the dark. You do not belong by the Book and all that cleanness."

Stabbed into him again was the bitter assurance which had been haunting him all day, and again the hot blood surged to his heart in a deadly determination, expressed in hisses of inaudible profanity, that he would do any violence, commit any crime, dare any peril, that he might break through

the social wall which he perceived to be shutting him out. He was more than ever possessed, as by a demon, with the delusion that the owner of a large and well-stocked farm, the husband of such a beautiful wife as Jessie Munro, himself fine-looking, educated, and of uncommon abilities, would be no longer Jerry McCord the white Pawnee, but Mr. Edward Payne and a very different kind of human being, in his own eyes and in the eyes of all men. So he was more in love than ever.

Perry Munro had no such trouble on his mind, but he had an uneasy feeling that he was all but playing the spy. He did not turn his eyes away, however, and when the hymn was ended Erica came to the door and looked up at the stars. Whatever answer they made her, she turned back into the house, and Perry rode away. He had seen and heard enough for one evening, and yet his adventures were by no means over. Neither were those of Jerry McCord.

No man, red or white, could long remain quiet under such circumstances as had that day been discovered by the survivor of the pair of Pawnee spies. He had both lost his comrade and found the lost brave's pony while spying after the movements of Jerry McCord, the distrusted captain of his own band. He had found a safe covert afterwards and had eaten a late dinner there, but even while eating he had been thinking profoundly.

He now again recalled the brave who had been discovered by Jerry at the foot of the tree in the camp, with no man to tell how he came to be dead.

"Ugh!" he said. "Jerry know. Now other brave gone. Keep eye open for Jerry. Heap snake."

It looked badly, considered by a plains red man as circumstantial evidence of something wrong, and he picked up his rifle with a gloomy shake of his head.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed. "Go find what Jerry do. Look out heap!"

He sprang upon the back of his pony and rode away, leading the other, but the plan he followed was thoroughly Indian. It led him to watch near the old camp, but not in it, until he witnessed Jerry's arrival and departure. After that, every step of the latter was witnessed at a safe distance, up to the dusky moment when he rode out from under the trees. All that he had seen of the improvements and the settlers had also been seen by the Pawnee, but he was of more importance than they, and it was a bitterness to lose sight of him. A man on foot can hardly chase with success a man on horseback in the daytime, and it is even a more tedious affair at night. Nevertheless the Pawnee did follow, longing for his pony and wondering vastly what his "captain" might be up to. The prairie around Chumley's Post was therefore

in a fair way to be thoroughly patrolled that night, and no man could guess with what consequences.

Perry Munro felt that his evening ride had succeeded wonderfully. His ears and eyes were full of what he had seen and heard, and as he rode slowly away it came to him strongly that there could not be a safer place on earth than the threshold upon which Erica Eagleson had finished her evening hymn.

Very likely he was right, considering what frail material merely human safety consists of, and he did not dream of what had been lurking among the rosin weeds while he had looked and listened. Neither did Jerry McCord himself know all, although well aware of his own presence and Perry's. A mounted man scouting after dark does not ride rapidly, and a Pawnee warrior can see a light as far as another.

Gustav Eagleson's lamp had guided more than one pair of feet, and when Jerry McCord felt sure that Perry was far enough for safety and arose to go for his horse, a human form which did not rise but that travelled well on all fours followed him at a moderate distance. That Pawnee was obtaining a higher opinion of Jerry, however, for he discerned that he was performing precisely the work he had outlined beforehand. It looked very much like "business," and yet the watcher again asked himself,—

"Got pony,—where brave gone? No find Jerry there."

That was so. He had seen no trace of Jerry's presence in that affair, nor of any other man. All he had found was a mysterious disappearance and a pony with blood upon his bridle. At all events he was sure that Jerry had now remounted and was riding towards the Pawnee Trail, and that he had not spoken to the other white horseman. That man's presence had also been a sore puzzle to the Pawnee until an idea came to him.

"Ugh!" he said. "Come 'teal young squaw. Old man there, old squaw there. Young squaw put head out and tell him 'can't come;' he go away."

That had not been precisely the meaning of Erica's appearance in the door-way, but the Pawnee did not understand Swedish customs.

Perry Munro had ridden slowly, as if his horse felt solemn about something, but it did not take him long to get very near Chumley's Post.

A low whinny of another horse asking a question of his own made him suddenly lift his head and peer forward into the gloom. The starlight revealed to him a sort of a mounted shadow close by the thin ghost of the hickory landmark.

It seemed to Perry as if all the wild stories he had heard since he came upon that prairie flashed through his brain in one hot warning of danger. His blood tingled to his very heels as he dug them

into his horse's ribs, and as the astonished beast sprang forward he heard his rider demand,—

"Who's there?"

"Halt!" came back for answer. Perry had never before known any words of his own to sound so marvellously deep, ringing, threatening. It was for that reason that they had not been recognized, and the response had been deeper and sterner, and with it he saw the starlight glitter upon a levelled line of polished metal. He drew his rein with sudden strength, checking his horse not more than two lengths from the mouth of a double-barrelled gun.

"Perry Munro?"

"Chumley!"

"Thank God that I did not fire!"

There was a world of intense feeling in that exclamation, and it occurred to Perry that if an enemy had been there instead of a friend his own rashness would but have thrown his life away. He had not so much as thought of his gun, so complete had been his surprise. He was altogether raw to the methods and exigencies of any kind of warfare, and all he could now say was,—

"What's up?"

"Ride closer. No man can guess whose ears are around. What brought you out? Have you seen anything out of the way? Have you met anybody?"

"Haven't seen a thing. Haven't met a soul. I was out for a ride. Is there anything going on?"

"I'm trying to find out, and we'd better keep still about it until we know more. Red Beauty will be back from the timber in the morning."

"Yes, but what is it all?" asked Perry, half excitedly.

"Some of Jerry McCord's Pawnees are back again. How many or what for I don't know. Most likely he is with them, or if he isn't he will be."

"How do you know? Are you sure of it? Have you seen them?"

"Keep a secret, Perry? On honor?"

"I will. On my honor."

"Well, then, I haven't seen a single Pawnee, but I have seen a scalp of one of them, taken since breakfast. I didn't take it, and you'd better only guess who did."

"I can guess."

"Your place is safe yet, and so is mine."

"The dogs were quiet when I rode by. None of our folks are in bed yet."

"Go to the house and have a nice evening of it. I'll scout around."

"I guess not," said Perry, indignantly. "It's as much my duty as it is yours. I'd scout all night to come across one of those——"

"Hark!" rasped Chumley. "Get your gun ready. Ride! Keep together. Ha! Hear that?"

Galloping hoofs had gone past them in the dark-

ness and were now beyond them, as their horses bounded forward, side by side. Seconds only elapsed before somebody fired a shot, and the report was followed by a yet more thrilling sound full of evil omen.

"Perry," said Chumley, "that was a Pawnee war-whoop. They are here. Shoot at anything you see."

Whoever heard was likely to understand that warning, for it rang out with a sharpness which Perry remembered respectfully afterwards and spoke of to Jessie when he met her. At that moment he obeyed with a promptness which belonged somewhat to his very rawness and inexperience. He may or may not have seen a moving shadow or heard a rustle in the grass. Up came his gun all the same, and the buckshot of one barrel went hurtling into the night.

"Hold your other load! What did you see?"

"I can't say."

"It was right to let drive anyhow, if only to let them know we're out after them and mean business. I suppose you needn't pull trigger on Jerry McCord at sight, but I must."

"After what happened at our place?"

"And what he did at mine. One of us has got to go under."

"Mr. Chumley, if I get a chance I think my gun would go off again."

"I hope you'll hold straight, then, for Jerry McCord is a good shot. Pull up. It's of no use to follow farther in the dark. We only heard one horse. Better go back to the Post."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DISTURBED HOUSEHOLD.

Jerry McCord crouching low in the grass, with his deep sense of being cast out, had recognized Perry Munro, but had sent out towards him no tendril of good-will as a possible brother-in-law. He was the rather stung by a keen perception that Perry was a perfect type of the men of rectitude whose unyielding ideas of manly honor spurned him away. He was part of the wall around Jessie, and stood between her and her lover now in the grass. He was hated exceedingly for that reason, but was safe from present harm for the sake of prudence.

"He's had a good look at Erica," said Jerry to himself, "but so have I. I wonder what he's out on horseback for at this time o' night? It can't be that they've smelt danger and are keeping up a patrol. I must follow him and find out."

That was the reason why he was so quickly mounted. He kept at what seemed to him a safe distance behind so very green a hand as Perry Munro must be, until he was startled by the gruff hails exchanged between him and Chumley. It was instantly evident that something uncommon was going forward, but it was a mistake to move too fast in trying to discover its nature.

Yet another complication came suddenly in at this moment. The Pawnee on foot had been able to come as closely as concealment permitted, while the leader upon whose conduct he was spying watched the scene at Chumley's house. He believed that he understood all, and when Jerry remounted he followed him again without any blundering until he also caught a glimpse of the pair of horsemen at the Post. That sight drew from him an astonished "Ugh!" and Jerry heard the sound, a little at his left and behind him, with a startled exclamation. The two incautious utterances reached the ears of Chumley together, just as Jerry spurred out of what seemed to him a kind of trap. He drew a pistol as he did so, and fired wildly at something human on foot which bounded forward at the same moment, and was answered by a war-whoop. He was no novice, however, in the ways and wiles of prairie warfare. While yet he had a start of his pursuers he wheeled at right angles with the course upon which he had

first ridden, and then, at the foot of the first roll over which he galloped, he suddenly reined in his horse and dismounted. His left hand was on the animal's nose to prevent a sound, and his right held a revolver. It was a very picturesque posture of horse and man, had there been light enough to do it justice, but its main beauty for Jerry was in the fact that Chumley and Perry rode past him within a short distance without imagining that they had done so. The adventure, as a whole, had done Jerry some good, for it had thoroughly convinced the Pawnee he had shot at that his distrusted captain was at war with that lot of pale-faces.

"Ugh! Good. No see Pawnee. No hit him. Where gone now? Ugh!"

His keen ears told him that the sound of Jerry's horse's hoofs had ceased too soon, and he prowled on like a wolf until he heard those of the two returning riders.

"No find Jerry. Ugh! Good. Pawnee find him. Say all right."

An Indian could find something to admire in an escape like that, while Chumley and Perry found it only mysterious and vexatious. By the time they were back at the Post, Jerry McCord felt secure in remounting, and, as he did so, there arose from the earth close by him the same piercing, thrilling sound which had replied to his random pistol-shot.

"There!" he exclaimed. "I thought I knew that whoop. Black Wolf?"

"Ugh!" responded a dark form which came stalking near to hold out a hand. "Black Wolf come help Jerry. Leave pony in woods. What do now?"

"Come along. Back to the woods. All these people keep their eyes open."

"Ugh! What for? Think Pawnee come? Jerry want more Pawnee, that all. 'Teal heap horse. Get mule. Jerry all right now. Black Wolf go tell all brave come along."

He was well able to keep up with a walking horse, and the two wolves went on towards the woods together.

That second war-whoop had been uttered just as Perry Munro and Chumley reached the Post, and the latter remarked,—

"Do you hear that? Whoever they are they have given it up for to-night. They've made up their minds we're wide awake. We can do no more out here in the dark. Come on to my house and then go to yours. Keep still about that scalp."

"I will. Do you think there is any danger of their making a night attack?"

"Not the least in all the world. These fellows are mere horse-thieves and cowardly highwaymen. The Pawnee tribe is at perfect peace, and gets its annuities regularly. This is a lot of vagabonds;

runaways; outlaws. They've no notion of being shot at from behind logs. Indians are the poorest kind of burglars. They'd hardly make a living at anything if it wasn't for what your government does for them."

Perry noted, half unconsciously, the expression "your government," but his reply was,—

"I suppose they do better guided by a sharp white man like this fellow McCord."

"Of course they do. Dismount and come in with me for a minute when we get to the house. You hardly know what a fort it is."

"I will, and we'll make some improvements on ours."

"Fences and stable doors and another dog like Bob," said Chumley.

They had ridden rapidly while talking, and it was not long before all the dogs tied up at his house loudly announced that they had heard the approaching hoofs this time. As the pair of horsemen drew nearer the gate, the three inmates came hurriedly out, and it was also evident that they had first untied the dogs.

"That kind of noise," said Chumley, "is warning to any kind of thief. It tells him his coming is known."

Perry sprang to the ground and fastened his horse while Chumley led his own through the gate, and the former determined to let the latter tell the

story of their adventure, as much or as little of it as he might choose.

It was made somewhat brief, but all Chumley's care could not conceal the fact that there were enemies in the neighborhood. Gustav showed his fine range of white teeth, and his blue eyes glittered. He may have been a forgiving man, but something he said indicated that he had an account to settle with the tribe of Pawnees yet, in spite of the little graveyard down at the Post. He and his wife exchanged glances, and the shake of her head indicated that she understood him. Something in Erica's face, as she listened, might easily have been interpreted:

"We need not be afraid. We shall be perfectly safe with so much protection as we have." It was full of enthusiastic confidence in the prowess of at least one member of that "patrol."

Chumley's invitation to Perry must have been a mere subterfuge, for he and Gustav walked off to the stables and Mrs. Eagleson followed them, leaving Perry alone with Erica. It was on his mind that he ought to say something reassuring, if he could find the proper shape to put it in, and she also was silent for a moment as if hunting the best words for a difficult thought.

They came to her after a fashion, and she looked at him earnestly as she asked him, or herself, the question,—

"Perry, I did not think of it while Mr. Chumley was talking,—what if the Pawnees killed you?"

"No danger of that, I guess. They might kill Chumley, too."

"No danger?" she exclaimed, as if the idea grew upon her. "They shoot! They murder! Did I not see them once? It was horrible! They meant to kill us all."

"Chumley can shoot better than he could then," said Perry, with an effort at cheerfulness. He thought her face was more than ordinarily beautiful in its keen expression of anxiety for the present and of horror at that black memory. She now arose from the chair in which she had been sitting.

"I must speak to Mr. Chumley," she said. "He must let you ride home at once. They may have followed. What if they had, Perry?"

"Don't worry about me, Erica. It isn't easy to hit a man on horseback in the dark," replied Perry, but he was aware of an extremely pleasant sensation. He had not thought, up to that moment, how very nice it might be to have a young woman anxious about him.

She went for Chumley without another word, but he agreed with Perry that the ride home would be entirely safe. They all stood in the door and on the step to bid him good-night, but the last words he really heard were,—

"Ride fast, Perry. Please do!"

She had sent him out of the house and compelled him to go home, but he nevertheless rode away with a strong feeling that he would like nothing better, that night, than to ride around after Pawnees and kill a few and get himself wounded a little in defence of at least a part of the contents of Chumley's house.

That gentleman quieted the excitement of his household as speedily as he could after Perry's departure. He compelled the Eaglesons to go to their own rooms, tied up all his dogs, and took a last look at the doors and windows of the house and stable. Then he put out his own lamp and lay down, fully dressed, upon a rug of wolf-skins in the middle of his front-room floor.

"Somehow or other," he said to himself, "I feel better here than on my bed. It's an eccentricity."

It was not so much that as the one evidence he had given of being under any excitement whatever, and not made of wood or iron. It was perfectly safe for him to sleep soundly until he should hear from his dogs or from daylight, and before long he was doing so.

Of all in that house, however, Gustav was asleep first and Erica last, and even after her eyelids closed they came apart again, as if she were trying to keep them open and listen.

Perry Munro went home with an expectation of finding his family all abed and asleep and only Bob

sitting up for him, but he was mistaken. The windows, as he rode up, looked as if every lamp in the house were lighted, and he was loudly hailed by Uncle John from the stable door:

"Is that you, Perry?"

"What's the matter, Uncle John?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, but I wish I had loaded this gun before I left the house. Have you been anywhere? Is there anything up?"

He was plainly disturbed, but he failed to explain why, and it was not until Perry reached the house that he was made to comprehend the situation.

The disturbance was in great part the work of Bob. He had been shut up in the stable unintentionally by Perry, when that somewhat absent-minded young man rode away, and had behaved himself so quietly that nobody knew or cared where he was until about an hour, or less, before his master's return. Then, all at once, the entire Munro family had been led to exclaim, as with one voice,—

"What can be the matter?"

They all knew that Uncle John replied correctly when he added,—

"That's Bob. Something has disturbed him. We had better get up and ascertain what he means by it."

Bob did not know or say. He had a clear idea that wickedness of some sort was sneaking around

his premises, and he hurled out at it the utmost vehemence of his canine denunciation. His least snarl, as he tried to paw his way out of that stable, threatened ruin to somebody, while his loudest roar of barking offered a study of expressive sound. It meant all that could be said by a large and angry watch-dog shut up.

Mr. Munro and Uncle John should have dressed more rapidly, for before Bob grew at all quiet a lady in a very white dress unlocked the stable door and let him out, and he sprang away with a savage growl to search and patrol all the darkness at all near the house. Mrs. Munro had been followed by the rest of the family, and afterwards Uncle John had gone out with his empty gun, but Bob did not reappear until he heard Perry's whistle. He obeyed that promptly enough, whatever may have been his regret that he had nothing to fetch in with him. Such, for instance, as a wolf or a stray Pawnee, for something evil had been around that house, and Bob would have given many bones to have known precisely what it was.

Jerry McCord could have told him, for he had warned his red associate not to scout too near the Munro house, and not to create the very state of suspicious watchfulness that was now sure to result. That Pawnee had an inadequate idea of Robert Munro's nose and ears until he was forced to exclaim,—

"Ugh! Heap loud dog. Ugh! Heap mouth go off! Black Wolf no want him." And with that assurance deepening in his mind he had hurried away.

Bob was now apparently satisfied that the cause of his temporary excitement had left the neighborhood. He took Uncle John's place at the stable door without any gun, but such weapons as he had were in first-rate fighting order.

Mrs. Munro told Perry all she knew, and asked him, with an anxious look into something very new in his face,—

"What could have made Bob so very furious? Have you any idea?"

"Mother," he replied, slowly, "I can't say. It may have been Jerry McCord and it may have been a Pawnee, but I can tell you one thing,—I've heard a Pawnee war-whoop!"

Uncle John was in the very act of taking up a cartridge to put into his gun, but all the rest had been getting more and more calm until they heard that remarkable assertion. Mrs. Munro sharply exclaimed,—

"Oh, Perry! My son!"

Jessie sprang to her feet and came close to her brother to ask him,—

"A Pawnee? Where was he? What did he do? Did you see him?"

Mr. Munro walked straight across the room after

the boots he had just kicked off, but Uncle John very deliberately inquired,—

"A war-whoop? How do you know it was a war-whoop? How could you distinguish the whooper's tribe?"

"I didn't, but Chumley did. He's heard one before."

The story was begun now, and he told it all very well, so far as it related to anything or anybody but Erica Eagleson. He remembered his promise of secrecy as to the deeds of Red Beauty, but he spoke very strongly of Chumley and all his works.

When the narrative was ended, the faces around him told him that he had failed to give the situation an air of peace and security. All assurances from Chumley that they were living in a quiet neighborhood had a hollow sound. Still, they agreed with Uncle John when he observed,—

"I do not really see that we can do anything more about it to-night."

"I don't believe we shall do any sleeping," said Mrs. Munro. "Why, husband, this is dreadful!"

"So it is, my dear," said he.

"Chumley says it isn't," persisted Perry. "You all go to bed. I'll lie down, but I won't undress. Bob is the only fellow that needs to keep awake."

"As if any of us could close our eyes!" said Jessie, indignantly; but for all that every one of them did so in due time,—even Bob.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A PAWNEE PICNIC ENDED.

Bob's deep-voiced warning to Jerry McCord and Black Wolf that they were too near him had drawn from the former but one comment,—

"That dog must be got rid of, and so must Chumley's."

As to any other small incidents of that night's ride, he had no thoughts to spare for them. He had already given up the problem of how the settlers had been stirred up to do any patrolling, and was dealing with another. What could be the real meaning of the unexpected presence of Black Wolf? Direct questioning was likely to be hopeless work, but skilfully managed roundabout lying on both sides enabled Jerry to get an idea that his own Pawnees believed him to be a man worth watching. The story of the disappearance of the other brave was so deep a puzzle that he determined to look into it in the morning. The look of things was anything but promising, and he could but wish that he and Jessie were already eastward bound upon a bridal tour. He did not know that she was lying wide awake, thinking of him.

He and Black Wolf made their way to their old

camp. They made no fire, but each expressed his lack of confidence in the other, and perhaps a memory of the dead sentry at the foot of the tree. The Pawnee lay down first and seemed to fall asleep very quickly, and then Jerry did the same some paces away from him. Before a great while Black Wolf silently arose and glided away into the darkness. Some minutes passed before Jerry himself stealthily followed so instructive an example. Each went for a safer spot to sleep on, saying in his suspicious heart,—

"I'd rather not be knifed in the night."

Morning came and breakfast, and Jerry returned to the subject of the missing brave. His duty to all the band, he said, required that he should investigate that matter thoroughly. Black Wolf heard in silence, but it grew upon him that his own good name and safety were involved, and at last he arose and beckoned Jerry to follow him, saying,—

"Ugh! Jerry come. Leave horse. Walk. Show him where found pony."

Both carried their rifles as if they had an idea of finding sudden use for them, and it was not a long walk to the trail of the "lost brave."

Two men on foot could follow it better and more searchingly than could one on horseback. When they came to the spot where their friend had so suddenly fallen from his pony, the precautions taken by Red Beauty to hide it proved insufficient. There

was enough of disturbance of leaves and grass, in spite of all care, to induce a careful study. Then the Black Wolf exclaimed "Ugh!" and pointed at a dark spot upon a stone, and Jerry at once said "Yes, blood."

Just then a sound like the bark of an angry dog came up from the deep ravine beside them, and they peered over the precipitous edge. It was not a dog, but a solitary *coyote*, pawing viciously at a heap of stones and rubbish at the bottom of the ravine. A hasty shot from Jerry's revolver missed the wolf, but sent him galloping down the ravine and out of sight. It was not many minutes before Jerry and his Pawnee were busy at that very heap of rubbish, both in removing it and afterwards in putting it back again.

Each was acquitted of that murder by what the other saw. Jerry knew that one Pawnee might kill another in a quarrel, but it was impossible that he should scalp him. On the other hand, the Pawnee knew that the work done upon his friend's head had been performed by some red man, he could not guess of what name or nation. All that now remained was to pilot Jerry to the spot where the pony had been found tied, and they wondered together over the fact that no trail led away from the foot of that sapling.

The escape of the Red Beauty had been admirably well performed, and would have remained a

mystery had not the quick eye of the Pawnee discovered a tree-branch bending down unnaturally low. A further inspection led all the way back to some twisted twigs upon the sapling, and the Pawnee exclaimed, in a tone of deep respect,—

"Great chief do all that. Heap snake. See? Big brave. Say Pawnee find pony, no find who kill. Only care for 'calp."

That obvious fact made the whole transaction respectable in Indian eyes. Some old feud had been relentlessly followed up to a bloody conclusion. Revenge had been skilfully taken, and the avenger had escaped in a manner which rendered detection or pursuit impossible.

The Pawnee studied the matter very much as a connoisseur in painting would study a suddenly discovered "old master," or as an acute lawyer might follow the perfect handling of a difficult case. Jerry himself shuddered as the idea grew more clear to him that the brave now lying under the stones in the ravine had never known what hurt him. It may have strengthened him in a suddenly ripened purpose which made him send away Black Wolf at once with orders to the rest of the gang to come and take revenge for both of their slain companions. It was as easy to say two as one, and by sending the messenger he was left unencumbered to carry out any private plan in his own way. The Pawnee was quickly upon his pony's back,

galloping westward. He left behind him a bad white man in an uncommonly disturbed state of mind.

"The devil's against me!" he exclaimed, as if with a burst of fierce resentment against a well-served and ungrateful master. "Everything went along well enough until I set out to reform and get married and settle down."

That was a curious description to give the precise plan he now had on hand, and it sounded as discordantly when he quoted,—

"'The course of true love never did run smooth.'"

He hoped that his Pawnees, or some of them, would come, but he was not half sure what they would do with him or he with them after their arrival.

Just such a doubt had been as busy as a bee among his own Pawnees ever since they saw him ride away. It was true that they had two spies sent ahead to watch their dashing leader, but who should watch those two spies? It worked like an oversupply of yeast in a "tin" of flour. The fermentation was rapid, and half the remaining braves were already so soured and jealous that they were riding hard along the Trail, bent upon arriving in time somewhere, they knew not exactly where, to be sure of their share of they could not pretend to say what. The very secluded place of

refuge they left behind them contained, therefore, only half a dozen of the laziest braves, more than twice as many squaws, and a varied collection of live-stock, when it was called upon to receive unwelcome visitors.

The dogs of that camp barked readily, and the fact that they all went off into fits of noise together was not of itself cause for general perturbation in broad daylight. Nevertheless, long before Black Wolf halted for his mid-day rest, many long miles away, and before he had met his coming kinsmen, an unknown disaster fell suddenly upon all of them. The camp-dogs knew that something was coming, and said so vehemently, and one brave aroused himself to cuff a squaw and bid her go and see what was the matter.

He should have bidden her go at once and remove the rocky ledges behind that camp, which shut it in and prevented a swift retreat from it. She would hardly have had time for more than she actually performed before the trouble foretold by the dogs was distinctly visible. The yell she uttered was a sort of spark to touch off every other yell and whoop in that little valley, and all these were replied to by the stirring notes of a cavalry bugle.

It was all too late for anything but noise. The last Pawnee to leave his camp that morning had fallen into the hands of blue-coated Philistines,

and now the captain and his men came galloping in, sabre in hand.

The bugle and the blue uniforms were quite enough, so far as winning a victory was concerned, for not a Pawnee vagabond there had a thought of making fight. Their only anxiety seemed to be to convince the captain of their peaceableness, general good purposes, and great love for him and all other White Chiefs.

Would they go at once to the Reservation? Of course they would, and take all the squaws and ponies with them, and tell him where to find all the other Pawnees and that very bad white man, Jerry McCord, who had induced them to leave the Reservation and that honored friend of theirs, the Agent.

"Sergeant," said the captain, "you and four men, with two of the scouts and the quartermaster, will be guard enough for these fellows."

"Yes, sir," said the sergeant, saluting; but a scout not in uniform had a looser tongue.

"Guard, captain? They'll go right in, so's not to get punished and so they can claim a bigger sheer of these yere critters, 'fore the others are fetched in."

"Take all their arms away, anyhow. Move them at once, sergeant. I must push right on. There's mischief prepared for somebody, or I'm mistaken."

Every squaw was ready to catch horses and pack

up, for long experience had taught them the futility of any argument with an army officer carrying out his instructions. As one middle-aged red pony-packer briefly expressed the matter,—

"Blue-coat heap devil. Speak once; next time, no speak,—shoot."

"No shoot squaw," remarked her next friend. "Want Jerry. Go find him now. Ugh!"

Their picnic was ended, but the captain still had work before him, and within an hour he was out of that valley.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MORE BLOOD ON THE PAWNEE TRAIL.

THERE was something the matter with Perry Munro the morning after he heard his first Pawnee war-whoop. He was always up and out early enough, but he attended to his stock now with a strange feeling that not quite so much of him had ever before arisen. His overflowing energies put him on horseback before breakfast, and the rest sat down without him. His very absence added to the vigor with which they discussed all they knew of the events of the previous evening, and kept them

at the table longer than usual. They had not risen from it when his rapidly returning horse-hoofs called them out to learn where he had been and what for.

"Chumley says we're all right," he almost shouted. "Red Beauty has come in and gone out again. Not a trace of danger, and if there is he will let us know."

That was somewhat more than Red Beauty had actually reported to Chumley, and the old Potawatamy had not returned to the forest without some small hope of getting another shot at somebody. He had made sure of but one thing, and that was that if any considerable number of Pawnee perils were coming, they had not yet arrived.

The only evidence that Perry had seen Erica Eagleson was a message from her to Jessie that she was coming over early for a horseback-ride.

For all that, however, Chumley had been actually seen to chuckle inwardly that morning. Almost his last words to Perry had been,—

"By and by you and I had better make a scout of our own. I'd like to look along the Trail for a mile or so myself."

"I'll be ready," shouted Perry, as he mounted his horse and rode away, but an anxious questioning look grew fast upon the face of Erica.

"Mother," she said, "I don't believe they'd find anything if they went."

"I hope very much not," was Mrs. Eagleson's emphatic response; but Chumley's—

"I shall be hardly satisfied till I do," was answered by Erica,—

"Well, Red Beauty can find out more than you, and he won't get himself hurt, and Perry couldn't find out anything, and you'd better take Red Beauty if you go."

There came in Chumley's quiet perception of something, and Erica walked out into the kitchen, leaving her mother and father to finish that conversation.

"It may look useless," he said to them, "but it isn't. The surest way to send Jerry's Pawnees about some other business is to show them that we are watching for them."

That was Perry's explanation of it to his own family circle, and Uncle John remarked,—

"I suppose he understands their character better than we do."

Jessie's eyes were pugnaciously bright when she added,—

"I wish I were a man and could go with them."

"You and Erica can scout around on the prairie," said Perry. "I guess there won't be much farm work done to-day. Not till we know more about the whooping and shooting."

"I wish I had heard it," said Jessie.

"It was evidently of a hostile character," said

Uncle John, and the rest of that morning at the Munro homestead had so much to do with arms and ammunition that they were all astonished when Chumley rode over apparently unarmed. It was very nearly provoking that he carried no gun, and to find him so cool and unconcerned, but Jessie found herself looking at him almost too intently while she said to herself,—

"He has killed three Pawnees. I wonder if he ever killed anybody else, or if Mr. Payne ever did." And she turned her head away with a strong conviction in her mind that Chumley at least would not hesitate about doing whatever he might deem needful with any weapon in his hand. He did not dismount, but rode right on, telling Perry he should stop for him on his return.

"He won't find me here," exclaimed Jessie, and that was where the mischief of that day began.

She saddled her horse at once and rode over to Chumley's house for Erica, only to meet that young lady half-way, in every inch as excited a condition of mind as herself.

"Perry and Mr. Chumley were at the Post," she said, "when all those Pawnees passed them. Let's go and look at it."

"Nobody there now," said Erica.

"But we can look around, and we can visit your grove."

Off they went, as if to examine some old battle-

ground and refresh historic memories; and there was no reason why a ride in that direction should not be entirely safe. A ride in another might not be, however, and all of Chumley's icy calmness vanished at once on his return from what may have been a patrol and an inspection of the line of forest. He was told of Jessie's departure just as Perry mounted his horse.

"Gone?" he said, with sudden energy. "We must get to my house before they start, Perry. They must run no risks. Quick, now."

Perry had not thought of peril to his sister or Erica up to that moment, and he galloped after Chumley with a fierce something burning hotter and hotter around his heart, such as he had never felt before. Not a glimpse did they obtain of the objects of their anxiety, and before they reached Chumley's gate he turned and shouted to Perry, three lengths behind him,—

"Not there. They have gone already."

A glance along the Trail towards the prairie seemed to convince him that they had not gone in that direction. They would be yet in sight if they had, he thought, and he added, almost savagely,—

"The woods! They are crazy! Full of devils for all we know."

Erica's father was in the door-way, as if to ask the news, and to him the next words went:

"Gustav, my rifle! On my bed."

"Want a revolver?"

"No, my belt is on. Quick."

Gustav's movements were swift enough, and the question in his eyes as he handed the repeater over the fence was answered with,—

"I'm afraid the girls have gone into the timber. We must catch up with them right away. No need of your coming."

Perhaps, but Gustav went at once for a gun and to saddle a horse ready for action if need should be.

Perry had his double-barrel with him, and if Jessie and Erica had really been in the timber, they would shortly have had a formidable escort home again.

It was all a mistake, and that which had already come to pass in the woods made it more complete.

Black Wolf had not ridden far upon his errand before he met another of his kind to tell him that the rest were coming without waiting to be sent for, and the pair turned back together to hunt for Jerry McCord. They were reasonably ready to do his bidding, but his own mind was yet more than a little perplexed as to what that bidding should be. The problem before him was one of extreme difficulty, for it involved revenge on Chumley taken in such a manner that Pawnees only should be charged with its performance, while all the fire in his selfish heart demanded the winning of Jessie Munro.

More and more did she seem to him to include all the hope remaining to him, and it never so much as occurred to him to consider whether or not her own happiness would be served by her becoming his property. Again and again did his cunning assure him, nevertheless, that whatever might happen to Chumley or anybody else must in no manner be traced to him, and he was keenly on the watch for some such set of circumstances as actually came.

Before they came, however, the state of his mind grew more and more savagely perplexed. Another scout along the edge of the timber gave him an assurance that it was no place for him.

"I can do absolutely nothing without the Pawnees," he exclaimed, aloud. "Luck is against me."

Waiting was terrible work under such conditions, but he sought a cover of dense underbrush, near the line of the Trail, to fume and curse and grow more bitter in. His horse was in a yet more retired hiding-place, but not too far away to be quickly reached if need should be. From such a post of observation he could do little more than make sure of the fact that there was little or no travelling at that time along the Pawnee Trail.

Two passengers came, after a while, from the westward, and Jerry's first glimpse of them brought to his lips an exclamation of profane astonishment, and to that he added,—

"Black Wolf already? One-eyed Sam with him? That means that they are all on the road. Ha!"

The last explosive whisper came from him as he glanced from the pair of Pawnees along the Trail to the eastward.

"What if they kill Perry also?" he said to himself, as he almost instantly levelled his rifle through the thick cover. "I can't help it if they do. I'm afraid he's almost as much in my way as Chumley is. Hope he'll kill one of them first, and I can kill the other, or both of them. Just the yarn I'd like to have to tell Jessie and the old folks. My luck has come."

All the devil in him was at work, at all events, as if other devils were stirring him up to the murderous plot that had flashed upon him. His breath came hard and slowly drawn, but his hand was steady and his black eyes glared like coals as he waited the yet nearer approach of the unsuspecting horsemen.

The mistake made by Perry Munro and Chumley as to the direction of Jessie's and Erica's morning ride sent them galloping towards the timber the moment Gustav handed the rifle to the latter.

"They can't have gone far, Perry, and we shall catch up before any harm can come to them."

"Perhaps they didn't come this way."

"We must find out. My blood's all on fire, but

I could shoot straight. Red Beauty is in here somewhere."

They rode more slowly after entering the forest, sending swift glances right and left, and listening as if some voice might come to them from among the green shadows.

None came, and they had already pushed on as far as they could think it likely the girls would venture, when they saw something which instantly stirred anew their fading anxieties.

"Two of Jerry's Pawnees, Perry! No other Indians around here."

"Will they fight?"

"Not off-hand. We must meet them friendly. Leave it to me. Be ready for quick work."

At that instant Perry turned on his saddle with a great spasm of dread sweeping over him. His eyes had been upon Chumley's face, and he saw it change suddenly, as the report of a rifle rang out beyond them. The hand which held Chumley's repeater cast it away with a convulsive motion, but there was yet a grim smile upon his resolute lips when he reeled into Perry's outstretched arms. The latter's foot had slipped from the stirrup, and the weight he had grasped forced him completely off his horse. He managed to prevent Chumley from falling to the ground, and bore him with desperate strength into the bushes on the right. The Pawnee war-whoop was ringing in his ears as he

did so. Black Wolf and his mate had fired no shot, but instantly caught the meaning of the one fired, and they saw the fall of the man upon whom they had come to work revenge. The fact that they saw both of the white horsemen go down, seemingly, led them to dash forward with a rash haste unbecoming warriors of their tribe and training.

Perry Munro had dropped his gun to catch his falling friend, but he was now leaning across the body he had rescued, and in his hand was a cocked revolver. The first Pawnee that recklessly pulled in his horse to see what had become of those two fallen white men was but ten feet from the muzzle of that revolver when it went off. He uttered but one yell as he pitched forward to the earth. His companion wheeled with Indian swiftness just as the crack of yet another rifle came to Perry's ears, and he saw this Pawnee also throw up his hands wildly. Three bounds of the pony and he was riderless, but it was yet a puzzle who had made him so.

"Chumley's done for," growled Jerry McCord, savagely, in his ambush, "and Perry will swear the Pawnees did it. Sorry they did not kill him. He's quick on the trigger, but who fired that other shot? It's my warning to lie low and slip away while my chance is good."

No brave in his band could have followed that

"He uttered but one yell as he pitched forward to the earth."

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advice more snakily, and in doing so he made it easier for another performance of the kind to be accomplished. Perry Munro knew that the two Pawnees he had seen were accounted for, but he could not guess how many more were near whom he had not seen. It might be sure death to go for his gun or Chumley's rifle. He thought of that; he looked at Chumley's white face; then there came burning into his brain a hot thought of his sister and of Erica.

"I must find them or die!" he shouted, as he bounded out upon the Trail and picked up the weapons.

His horse and Chumley's had run but a little distance among the trees, but before he could go for either he heard behind him a short, sharp, yelping cry, and it made him turn again towards Chumley's body.

"Red Beauty!" he exclaimed.

"Boy, come back! Quick. Devil in bushes kill Chumley. Shoot boy next."

Quite another thought than one of personal safety took Perry again under cover.

"Red Beauty, where is my sister? Where is Erica?"

"Not in woods. Old Indian watch around all day. Squaw no come. Boy kill one Pawnee. Red Beauty kill one. Rifle in bushes kill Chumley. No see him. Think Jerry McCord."

He and Perry were kneeling at the side of their wounded friend, and he was hastily making a sort of surgical examination while he made his comments on the situation.

"You are sure they did not come?"

"Squaw no come at all. Chumley fool and come. Boy fool come, but shoot heap good."

He had torn open the shirt and undershirt while speaking, and Perry's face whitened and his heart sank. It was well to be assured of the safety of his sister and of Erica, but he was now looking upon his first bullet-wound. According to his ideas of surgery, a man shot through the body must be mortally hurt, as if all the space enclosed by the ribs were occupied by heart and lungs, upon which the touch of flying lead is certain death.

"Ugh!" said Red Beauty. "Boy help turn Chumley over."

They did so, with silent care, and Perry shook his head mournfully. The bullet had turned to the right in its passage, but it had not paused; it had gone clean through.

The blood was flowing freely, and they strove to stanch it, and while they were doing so a sort of shudder went over the body. Perry thought he felt it in every corner of his own frame, and just then the eyes of the man he thought killed came slowly open. He was looking into the face of Red

Beauty, and there was much meaning in his questioning:

"How?"

"Chumley dead. No speak. Red Beauty kill one Pawnee. Boy kill one. Ugh! No talk."

"Can you speak, Chumley?" asked Perry, in spite of the interdiction.

"I'd best not. He says so. He knows. Where am I hurt?"

"Through the body. Badly."

"Are any bones broken?"

"No," said Perry, in some surprise. "I should say not any."

"I'd better be taken home, then. I find I can breathe."

He was in perfect possession of his senses, at all events, and understood what was further said of the situation.

"Boy watch by Chumley," said Red Beauty. "Old Indian go for help. Boy see Pawnee, no ask question, shoot quick. Shoot Jerry."

"I'll shoot quick enough," said Perry. "Go right away."

The Potawatamy had not waited for any assent or dissent. He was master of his own movements, and these were marvellous. Perry was not sure at what precise spot he lost sight of him, so deftly did he disappear through the underbrush and among the trees.

"The girls?" came from Chumley's lips in an agonized whisper.

"Red Beauty says they have not been in the woods."

"Thank God! They are safe. I don't care one straw now. If this kills me you may tell them so."

He shut his eyes again, and Perry crouched by him, gun in hand, sending swiftly searching glances in all directions and listening for the slightest sound.

CHAPTER XXX.

BRINGING IN THE WOUNDED.

Jerry McCord slipped away from his ambush with an inward assurance that part, at least, of his present purpose had been remarkably accomplished. He had seen Chumley fall, and he was satisfied that the death of the two Pawnees sufficiently covered his own share in the murder. While regretting that he might still have a brother-in-law or even worse in Perry Munro, he felt that a great advance had been attained. Among the difficulties yet before him was the pretty certain arrival of the remainder of his own band, but a man of genius, desperately in love, could turn even such an incon-

venient circumstance to his profit, and he believed he saw a way opening. It was obviously well, however, that he should at once get away from the scene of the tragedy and nearer any possible opportunity for adventurous love-making. Immediately after reaching his horse he led him by a long detour to a covert he had before made use of, in full view of the Munro homestead. Some other important things took place while he was so doing, and preparations of which he knew nothing were made for occurrences yet to come.

When Jessie and Erica rode out along the Trail, full as were their minds of the occurrences of the previous evening, they had but faint perceptions of any possible peril near them in broad daylight. Pawnees and other terrors might come around after dark, but the sunlight was upon the prairie now, and it had never looked more entirely at peace.

There was a contrary suggestion, truly, when they reached the Post, and recalled the fact that the five red men buried there had set their fatal trap in the daytime. Even that bit of frontier history, however, had its influence upon their riding on at once to the grove where the Eagleson camp had been so suddenly turned into a battle-ground.

"Seems to me," said Jessie, as they reached it, "as if the trees were closer together than when I saw them before, and cast a deeper shadow."

It was only the shadow of what had been done there, but they had hardly reached the spring before Erica looked around her with a shiver and exclaimed,—

"Let's go, Jessie. I don't want to stay here one minute. What would have become of us all if it had not been for Mr. Chumley?"

"He was splendid," said Jessie, as she wheeled her horse after Erica's; "but I'm glad I was not here to see him do it."

"It was what Red Beauty did that was dreadful to see, and the whoops and yells were awful."

"We'd better go home. They may have learned something new."

All the news they already had was responsible for their feverish and excited states of mind, but it was nothing at all to what they now galloped along the Pawnee Trail to receive.

"Jessie," suddenly exclaimed Erica. "Look! Red Beauty! What is he running for?"

Jessie's only reply was a lash to her horse in imitation of Erica, and they reached Chumley's gate at the same moment with the old Potawatamy. Gustav, too, had been on the lookout, and was there, ready to mount and ride, but the first words of Red Beauty to him were,—

"No horse. Fight behind tree, maybe. Send young squaw for father. All come fight Pawnee."

"Where is Perry? Where is Mr. Chumley?"

Two excited female voices asked him that question as one utterance.

"Jerry shoot Chumley. Boy shoot Pawnee. Red Beauty kill one."

"Mr. Chumley killed?"

That was Erica's voice, for Jessie in vain struggled to utter a sound. Gustav seemed to be grinding his teeth, and his wife now stood close behind him, her face pale enough but her blue eyes flashing fire.

Red Beauty was verbally defective as a story-teller, but he was great in pantomime, and in a minute more they all had vivid mental pictures of the occurrence in the woods. The old Indian crouched in the grass to show them how Perry was now watching by the wounded man, surrounded, it might be, by creeping enemies. He also very bluntly explained to them the cause of the disastrous ride into the forest, and the girls clearly understood that Chumley had fallen and Perry had risked his life in an effort to rescue them from supposed perils.

"We go at once," said Gustav.

"No," said Red Beauty. "All come. Bring Chumley. Young squaw RIDE!"

Jessie felt as if she needed that peremptory command to arouse her from a sort of amazement. In an instant more she was lashing her horse across prairie homeward, but it was all in vain to try and make it seem real.

There had been quite enough of excitement among the older members of the Munro family to make sure that they would all be out to receive a maiden who came with her astonished horse on a run under her ceaseless whip.

"What is the matter?" shouted Mrs. Munro, as the animal stopped at the very door-step. His breathless rider leaned forward white yet wrathful, to exclaim,—

"Jerry McCord and his Pawnees have murdered Mr. Chumley. Perry and Red Beauty killed two of them. Perry is alone in the woods guarding Chumley's body. Father? Uncle John? Gustav and Red Beauty are waiting for you!"

There was good stuff in the Munros. Those two men had never been in a fight in all their lives, but neither of them said one word now while they went for their weapons. Knitted brows, clinched teeth, rapid movements, while Mrs. Munro's questions drew out all else that was known to Jessie.

"My son!" she said, at last. "I'm glad he was there. God keep him! Husband——"

"I'm ready, wife. Good-by."

"Joe," said Uncle John, "it's a surgical case, and we don't know its character yet. Chumley's own mattress is a narrow one. We'd best get that and take it to bring him home on."

There was cool courage under that professional thoughtfulness, as well as in the steady persistence

with which the idea was afterwards carried out, but when the squad of four was fully gathered at Chumley's gate and moved forward towards the scene of the skirmish in the woods, it was plainly under the command of the old Potawatamy.

"Mother," said Jessie, as soon as Mr. Munro and Uncle John were gone, "what are we to do?"

"We can't stay here. I'll get my horse. If they——"

"What, mother?"

"My daughter! My daughter! If Perry is killed and the Pawnees come, all the rest of us had better be together in one house. It's dreadful!"

Their very ignorance of the facts made it more so, and suspense made them silent as they hurriedly finished such preparations as were needed.

They had mounted and were riding away, when Mrs. Munro turned for a look at the house, exclaiming,—

"Jessie, it may all be burned down before we see it again. We may all be murdered. There is no excuse for permitting such things. They ought all to be hung!"

"Who, mother?"

"White men like Jerry McCord and red men like his Pawnees."

It was almost a pity that such an expression could not have been heard by a man who was at that very moment staring at her and Jessie through a

binocular glass and pouring forth bad language concerning their departure from home. Jerry had been ready to shout over his good luck when he saw the two men hurry away and knew that the women were left alone. Now, however, it was the house that was left alone, and his changed opinion of his luck was finding expression.

"No use," he said, as they rode away. "I must keep still awhile and see what'll turn up. One thing is dead sure. If the rest of the band come along and find those bodies on the Trail, their blood 'll be up. I could save Jessie, but I couldn't do much more."

He knew his friends and associates, and his judgment of them could be relied upon. Things were looking dark for the little settlement at Chumley's Post.

During all that time Perry Munro kept his watch by the side of the wounded man with feverish vigilance. It seemed an age, crowded full of fearful imaginings of horrors which might come, or even that might already have come. Here was one. Could Red Beauty be sure that the girls had not ridden into the woods? Perhaps the houses were already attacked and their inmates butchered.

Terrible as were the possibilities, the thought of them did not interfere with the use of his senses, and his gun at last turned as if of its own accord towards a slight sound near him among the bushes.

"No shoot; Red Beauty——"

"Come along. Where are the rest?"

The Potawatamy made his appearance and explained himself very much to Perry's satisfaction. He had halted his three white privates behind some fallen trees, while he, their red chief, had scouted the woods for quite a distance beyond the place where Perry was waiting for him. He had thus made sure that there was no ambushed Pawnee near enough to do any immediate mischief. He now arose and gave three short, shrill yells, a signal agreed upon with Mr. Munro, and the three came forward at a run that brought them up hot and panting. Uncle John was instantly kneeling by Chumley, and Perry asked him anxiously,—

"How long can he live? It went clean through."

"Is that so? Glad of that."

"I thought so," said Chumley, faintly but firmly, and Uncle John exclaimed,—

"Hurrah! He can breathe and he can speak! I never saw but one shot-wound, but I've read enough about them. He bled well. That's a good sign. He must be handled carefully, and he will be laid up for several weeks."

"Ugh!" said Red Beauty. "Glad he not go dead. Get well, kill Jerry."

The mattress, left for a few moments behind the logs where they had waited, was now brought along by Gustav, and a "stretcher" was easily improvised

with two saplings and some cross-pieces. Chumley was lifted with slow care and laid thereon, and, while his four bearers took their places, the old Potawatamy went about a task that was all his own.

Perry's horse submitted to be captured, and the ponies of the slain Pawnees were quietly feeding at a little distance ready to be caught, but Chumley's own favorite threw up his heels at the old Indian's approach in a way that suggested prudence.

"He come anyhow," said Red Beauty. "Kick Pawnee. Ugh!"

He was right about the independent coming home of that horse, but the choice he might make as to the right tribe of Indians to kick was not quite certain. He avoided the reaching hand of the old Indian only to take his place behind the stretcher which bore his master, very much as if he were trying to copy some military funeral he had witnessed. If so, the "procession" moved on, leaving Red Beauty to his own devices, and these included other matters besides horses. There were two good rifles and sundry other weapons to be gathered, but the spoils of war included very little money. Instead thereof were a couple of well-seasoned brierwood pipes. So far all was well, but Red Beauty was an Indian brave to the backbone, and all the wild blood in his veins forbade him leaving the scalps of his enemies behind him. That he must hide them, and the taking of them, from his white

friends did not prevent him from adding them to the net results of his lingering behind.

The mattress with Chumley on it was a light weight for four strong men, and the bearers strode freely along, feeling reasonably secure from any attack in the rear, for they had a vast deal of confidence in their Potawatamy "rear-guard."

CHAPTER XXXI.

DEADLY PERIL.

Four women at Chumley's house waited for news from the woods with terribly sufficient reasons for anxiety, but not one of them fully comprehended the feelings of either of the others. Each had a widely varying stake in whatever might then be going on among the trees, and neither of them was willing to put her own into any form of verbal expression. It was Erica who at last exclaimed,—

"Oh, Mrs. Munro! Oh, Jessie! Oh, mother, —mother,—what if not any of them should come back alive!"

No words replied to her, but Mrs. Eagleson at once arose and walked out into the kitchen. She came back carrying two axes and a carving-knife, and remarked, in a hard, hoarse tone,—

"Gustav loaded all the guns. Your dog is here. So are Mr. Chumley's. I untied them now."

Jessie and her mother had each brought a revolver with her, and when all the weapons were spread out upon the dinner-table they made a formidable-looking array.

"We can bar the doors and windows," said Erica. "They are strong."

"Indians use fire," said Mrs. Munro.

"I'll die before they shall get in," exclaimed Jessie. "I'd rather be burned up a thousand times."

The several comments upon that remark foreboded a desperate defence of that log house against any assailants likely to come, but, in the absence of immediate signs of danger, they all went out and stood in front of the house, staring at the forest and wondering how long was to be their hour of suspense.

It was yet to have its moment of especial excitement, for Red Beauty and his horses travelled much faster than did Chumley's "procession." He caught up with it and passed it, saying as he did so,—

"Ugh! Bring Chumley home. Old Indian go tell squaw."

"That's right," said Mr. Munro. "Say the danger is all over."

That would hardly have been true, and it was not at all what he did say. He hastened the move-

ments of his quadrupeds by mounting one of the captured ponies, and the moment he was out of the woods he urged them all to a gallop. At that pace he came dashing along the Trail towards the gate Mrs. Eagleson swung open for him. He had not heard Jessie's terrified exclamation,—

"Erica! He is running! Where can all the rest be? Are they killed?"

"This is agony!" groaned her mother, and it was Mrs. Eagleson who now asked,—

"Where are they?"

"All 'calp," said Red Beauty. "Pawnee come for white squaw now."

"Speak the truth," almost screamed Mrs. Munro, for even the hideous solemnity of his face had in it something to suggest such a demand.

"Pawnee no 'calp 'em. 'Teal 'em. Jerry McCord come right away. Pawnee come 'calp poor old Potawatamy."

"Jessie," said Erica, "what does he mean?"

"Yellow-hair see boy horse? Boy lose 'calp. Yellow-hair no like him, 'cause got no 'calp. Come show head pretty soon. Say 'how.'"

"That's it, is it," said Mrs. Munro, with a great sigh of relief, for the last attempt at savage humor was accompanied by such a grin as no other face could make. "Perry is safe, Erica. Mr. Chumley must be the only person hurt. Poor fellow!"

"Chumley dead," said Red Beauty. "Bring

him home,—bury him. Black-hair squaw say, 'Poor fellow, glad he got kill; wait for Jerry.'"

Not much more could be gotten out of such a news reporter, and before long they saw the bearers and their load come out from among the trees.

"All four of them!" shouted Erica. "Oh, Jessie, they're all there!"

So they were, but after they reached the gate there was a difficulty. It seemed impossible to let those men pass through without kissing them for joy that they had returned, and it seemed impossible to keep Chumley's dogs from jumping upon the stretcher to see what was the matter with their master. A sort of compromise was attained through the necessity that all the women were under to restrain the dogs, and Chumley was carried into the house without being dropped or trodden under friendly feet.

Once he was placed in his own room, Uncle John turned out everybody but Mr. Munro, and Perry was in the hands of his mother and sister.

Mrs. Eagleson had already led away Gustav to hear his account of what he had seen and heard, and hardly had they entered the kitchen before a self-satisfied voice from its outer door asserted,—

"Very good old Indian. Kill Pawnee. Eat a heap. Heap fine squaw. Handsome."

"Come in! Come in!" said Mrs. Eagleson, eagerly. "Eat all you want. Tell me about it,

Gustav, but he's earned his dinner. Must be hungry. Not a mouthful all day."

He was likely to get all he needed now, to judge from the manner in which things came upon the kitchen table.

Erica listened to her father with an inner assurance that Jessie was hearing a more interesting story from Perry, but that nobody had a right to break in upon it so long as his mother was making such a fuss over him.

A captious historian of that fight might have observed that Chumley's share in it had been to get hit and fall from his horse, but Perry's praise of him went back to the furious interest he had taken in the safety of the girls, and he repeated what the wounded man had said in his first dim moments of half-returned consciousness. It threw a sort of heroic light upon his entire conduct, but it failed to detract one iota from the estimate formed by Mrs. Munro of the courage and prowess of her only son. She felt almost indifferent to the possible nearness of more Pawnees. If they should come to the house to be disposed of, here was Perry. He too, however, was unromantic, like Red Beauty, and a suggestion that he was hungry came at the end of his narrative like a punctuation mark.

"Of course you are. Jessie, wait here to know if they want anything for Mr. Chumley. Come, Perry."

The last word was spoken in the very door-way leading to the kitchen, and was followed by,—

"Mrs. Eagleson, Perry is hungry!"

"Oh, dear me! Bring him in. I cook for him all day. Coffee ready now."

Perry was close behind his mother, and Jessie was almost unceremoniously left alone. She felt no regret whatever, for some reason, and her eyes fastened themselves upon the latch of the closed door of Chumley's room. Beyond that door lay a man whose present suffering came to him largely on her account. She added, "and Erica's," but instantly there was a light in her eyes, for her thought went further and grew higher and better, and she said to herself,—

"Any woman! He and Perry would face Pawnees to defend any woman in the wide world!"

That was it, and her ideal of Chumley escaped being hurt by any taint of selfish considerations. He and her brother had behaved like men, and when Chumley was hurt Perry had remained by him regardless of consequences. She felt a glow of enthusiasm all over her, and when Uncle John put his head out of the door she sprang to her feet full of eagerness to do something.

"What is it, Uncle John?"

He came all the way out and shut the door behind him.

"Jessie," said he, "I think Mr. Chumley may

recover. There will be fever, of course, and I cannot discern the precise internal character of the wound. The fact that the ball is not in him relieves me very much, but there are some things in my leather case——"

"Where is it, Uncle John?"

"On the shelf, at the house."

"I'll go for it. There is no danger whatever. I'll come right back."

She was off before there was any time to consult with another soul, and Uncle John was too utterly absorbed in his first great surgical case to feel anything but satisfaction over the fact that he was to have his instruments and things as quickly as might be. Jessie sprang upon her horse and dashed away, and Perry Munro had nearly finished his hasty meal before his father, in Chumley's room, inquired of Uncle John,—

"Did Perry go for your instruments?"

"I don't know whether Jessie went herself or whether——"

"Jessie? You don't mean it! There is no danger, but then! I must go and see about that."

He did, and in half a minute more Perry Munro was mounted, gun in hand, riding away to escort his sister safely back, scolding her rashness as he went, but still without any strong persuasion that she had run any risk in going. He would have felt differently if he could have been advised of

what was then going forward under cover of the forest and along the Pawnee Trail.

Black Wolf had met one jealous Pawnee and brought him to where he could be readily wiped out, but the fact of that brave being ahead of them had been a sort of mild spur to the zeal of a round dozen more, and they had not been a long march behind him when he ceased pony-riding forever. Taken all as one, they had also operated as a spur to the keen sense of duty felt by the captain of cavalry. As he expressed it to the corporal now riding near him,—

"Corporal, I can't guess what mischief Jerry and his coyotes are up to, but we must try and catch up before they have a chance to finish it."

"One of the squaws let out that they had gone for scalps."

"More likely horses, but they wouldn't mind a little murder. It's right in their line."

If indeed the squaw had confessed a truth, about the first discovery made by her kindred was that scalps had been lost and not won. Before Perry Munro mounted his horse there had been a fiercely excited group gathered around the two corpses yet lying by the Pawnee Trail. It was plain to them all that there had been a sharp collision with somebody, and that the hand of at least one red man had been at work. If a collection of rugged syllables uttered by several of them could have been

translated, it may have been the title assigned by them to Red Beauty. Equally clear was their understanding of hoof- and boot-tracks and of the fact that a dead or wounded pale-face had been carried away. They read it that their comrades had been outnumbered. Had they been decoyed into some trap? If so, had it been done by Jerry McCord?

Suspicion was already kindled, and this mystery blew its fire briskly. That was no time or place for lingering, and the wrathful gang was quickly pressing forward along the Trail, determined to discover a solution. They had no plan except that free mention was made of Chumley as well as of Jerry and of the old Potawatamy. It was a blind rush for revenge, and was as likely to be wisely conducted as the "Amok" run of a frantic Malay. As they rode out from the forest they descried one horseman cantering across the prairie, and in an instant four yelling Pawnees were after Perry Munro.

He had seen, and the first thought in his mind was a question that did not relate to his own safety.

"Can I warn them all at Chumley's? Ought I to be there? No! They'll have warning enough. Can I reach our house before they catch up? If I lose this race what will become of Jessie!"

His brain seemed a mass of fire, and the good steed plunging along under him appeared hardly

to move, but he might have felt a madder heat if he could have seen further into the peril threatening his sister.

Jessie rode fast from the start, and for all that she could see there was not a human being on that prairie to note her going or her coming. She could not look through the log walls of her own home and know that on the opposite side stood a saddled horse at the door-step, and by him a handsome, dark-eyed man, in a neat suit of blue.

"If the wrong people should come," Jerry had said to himself, "all I've got to do is to ride away. It won't be Chumley, and I don't mind old Munro or his brother."

That was on his arrival, and after he had assured himself that the house was unoccupied. Just now he had withdrawn from a peering glance around the corner of the house and exclaimed aloud,—

"Jessie coming? All alone? My luck hasn't left me yet. So much for pushing right ahead. It looks almost as if I had sent for her."

So it did, and the unsuspecting girl rode up to the door nearest her and dismounted. She opened and entered, and there was as yet no sign or sound to occasion her the slightest uneasiness. She was even permitted to seek and find Uncle John's case of instruments, and she held it in her hand when the north door of the house opened suddenly and a man stood before her exclaiming,—

"Jessie, my love, I have come to save you. The Pawnees!"

"Mr. Payne? Jerry McCord! You and your Pawnees! Oh, God!"

The syllables heaped up with fear and agony as they followed each other, but they made no impression upon the unabashed villain before her. He did not at once come near her, for he had some prudence of cunning, and to his mind her instant horror must be of the savages. His vanity forbade an idea that she could shrink from him with all that loathing. His tongue worked on eloquently, for he was in no immediate haste. He knew she could not get away. Her very home had served as a trap to catch her in, and he made the best of his opportunity to tell her all the story of his passion and of his plan for her escape. According to him, the Pawnees already surrounded Chumley's house. Not a soul could leave it without death, if indeed one could by any possibility ever escape. The savages would be here also before long, and he who loved her had risked his life to come to her rescue. She must flee with him, and he by no means omitted setting forth in romantic outline his well-prepared arrangements for a wedding, an Eastern tour, and a return to a happy future to be shared by her with him. He was wasting precious time, for he had not the slightest idea how much truth he was telling. He knew not how nearly he had hit the facts

in his fiction concerning the nearness of his own gang. Still less did he dream what thoughts concerning himself were in them. Jessie heard in silence, because as long as he should talk she could think, but the moment he paused and took one step nearer, her voice sounded even in her own ears like a shriek of despair.

"Back! Back! I know you! You are worse than a Pawnee! You murdered Mr. Chumley!"

Even Jerry McCord could shrink before such an appalling response as that. She knew? How did she know? Could he have been seen to fire that felon shot?

He was repelled for a moment, but all the lost soul in him was being stirred to its depths. The fair girl's face of scorn looked into his as if from some plane of life ineffably above him. There was justice and judgment in it, and so there was power, but it was power against which the evil of his nature rebelled with determined bitterness.

"Jessie? Jessie Munro?"

She sprang towards the door, exclaiming,—

"I'd rather be killed by a Pawnee,—I hope they are coming."

"You shall not escape me."

He had seized her by her arm, but at that moment—shrill, piercing, thrilling—came down upon the wind a sound which he knew better than she did, for the brave nearest behind Perry was

"You shall not escape me."

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whooping his wrath over the fact that the latter was gaining. Jerry could but pause and listen to such a surprise.

"Fact!" he said, and in that breath of hesitation she wrenched her arm from him and threw open the door.

"Perry! My brother!" she screamed. "And they are after him!"

It was too much. For one brief moment her brain reeled and she staggered against the wall, while her enemy stepped past her for a glance at the situation. It needed but a look to bring from him a bitter blasphemy, and he turned towards the door beyond which he had left his horse.

"Jessie," he said, as much a liar and a rascal as ever, "come! It is your last chance for either yourself or your brother. Say 'yes' and I can save you both. Quick, or his blood is on your head and your own too."

"Never! Go! Murderer!" She recovered her thought and will as she hurled the words at him and sprang to the door, shouting,—

"Perry, I am here! Save me!"

That was what he had come for, but the outlaw laughed a laugh of triumph as he answered her cry with,—

"I shall have both of you in my power in three minutes."

He did not know what good generalship a woman

will sometimes exhibit without thinking. What he called his prudence, or it may have been his "luck," led him to make two steps beyond the threshold for his rifle, which had leaned against the side of the house to rest while he did his love-making. Like a flash went a female form across the room, and the door was slammed behind him. The wooden bar standing by it for such uses seemed to jump into its iron loops, and while the angry ruffian so shut out strained and swore against the sudden barrier between him and his prize, Perry Munro sprang from his horse on the other side of the house.

"Quick! Perry! Come in. I'm not hurt."

"We can hold the house."

That door also banged and its bar went up. The side-door leading into the "patent house" kitchen addition was quickly closed and braced with the table.

"The windows,—I can shoot him from one of them. There they come. What's that? Listen!"

The sound of arriving hoofs had been followed by yells and whooping and angry voices, among which for one moment sounded that of Jerry McCord, and then there were shots and curses and more whooping, and Jessie and her brother looked from the window upon a finished work of strange and bloody retribution.

Jerry McCord seemed to his Pawnees to have

come out of the very house their intended prey had escaped into. He came to meet them, calling upon them to help him capture it, only to be accused of being in league with their enemies for their destruction. The very frenzy of disappointed passion he was in led him to use words and gesticulations, understood only in small part, that changed the first hot altercation into an instantaneous collision. It was his "luck" that made him threaten one brave with his rifle, but he fired no shot. Not all that they fired hit him, but what was seen by Perry Munro and his sister from the window was the form of a lost white man rolling in the grass while a Pawnee sprang after him with a bowie-knife drawn. Blow followed blow with sickening persistency, as Jessie pulled her brother back from that horror, pleading,—

"Don't shoot, Perry. Don't fire at them. Wait and see what they will do. They may go away now."

Again she was a good general. The very fact of having killed their own leader cooled that squad of horse-thieves a little, and they had no idea whether the house held one white man or ten. They were content to ride away to a spot out of point-blank range and discuss the situation.

"Perry," said Jessie, "what shall we do? Were there any at the other house?"

"Do? Are you not hurt at all?"

It was almost the first word he had spoken, and it came from white lips, as if it hurt him.

"Not a scratch,—but mother?"

"I saw some of the devils ride in that direction. Red Beauty is in the house,—all the dogs,—father,—Uncle John,—they can defend themselves."

"So can we. Do you know, I was so excited I forgot all about my revolver. I could have shot him."

She said it as simply as if it had been a mere trifling operation, as she drew out the small, pretty, but deadly weapon that belonged to her.

"Keep it ready, Jessie. All we've got to do is to wait. We'll work around and get the whole house ready. We can die fighting, anyhow."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DARK HOUR AT CHUMLEY'S.

The ears of the old Potawatamy and of Bob Munro had not been made otherwise alike, but they seemed to catch a sound of coming danger at the same instant. No others of all in or about Chumley's house heard the first whoop that followed Perry, but Bob sprang towards the gate with a loud bark, and Red Beauty turned towards Mrs. Eagleson, remarking, quietly,—

"Pawnee coming. Call in all dog. Shut up house."

"Are they coming?" she said, and Erica rushed towards Chumley's room to call out the men who were there, only to be stopped by the old Indian. He said to her,—

"Squaw no tell Chumley. Wait. House heap fort. Beat Pawnee."

He was in command, as he had been of the squad in the forest, and when the foremost Pawnees galloped nearer, the only living being they saw was Mrs. Munro at the gate, straining her eyes at them and across the prairie as if she could so discover any signs of her son and daughter. Her husband

now came out, and with Mrs. Eagleson's help the half-frantic mother was conducted back into the house.

The whooping and yelling red-skins saw at once that their coming was prepared for, and they were not yet ready to ride within easy range of rifles held by pale-face settlers behind log walls. Even in a time of open war their kind of "light cavalry" works better in open country and against an enemy of known inferiority. They were in a state of intense and bloodthirsty excitement, but they also labored under one difficulty to which they were not accustomed, for they were without a leader or a distinct plan of action. They were in need of the brains of Jerry McCord, and these would never serve them again. Without them, however, they could make the air hideous with threatening sounds and fill the inmates of that house with shuddering dread.

The yells reached the ears of Chumley, upon his couch of suffering, and he would have made an effort to rise but for the quick-handed prudence of Uncle John. At that moment the patience of all the dogs seemed to have given way at once, and they responded to the war-cries beyond the fence with a furious chorus of their own.

There were beads of perspiration on Chumley's forehead as he faintly whispered,—

"Red Beauty?"

"He is here," said Uncle John. "He says they will not attack."

"That's good. The Eaglesons here?"

"All here. All safe. Mrs. Munro is here."

"I saw Perry. Jessie?"

Uncle John had struggled hard, as a professional man, to retain composure before his patient, but Chumley read the ashen dread that swept across his face as he answered,—

"Perry is out on the prairie. Jessie is at the other house."

"My God in heaven!"

There are moments of supreme agony in human lives which pass beyond the ideal thought of all who are not so suffering. No window is into the depths of that hot darkness, but Uncle John himself turned away from what he saw in the up-looking eyes of the helpless man before him.

The warning crack of a rifle, fired by Red Beauty through the hole in the front door, served as an excuse to several voices to exclaim,—

"Are they coming?"

"Ugh! No come if gun say keep away. Pawnee lose pony."

That was a fact. One brave had ridden too near the gate on an errand of investigation, covering his person behind his horse, and the shot of the old Potawatamy had sent him away on foot, for the pony made but one spring and rolled over lifeless.

The puzzle of the Pawnees was to be solved for them in an unlooked-for fashion.

The captain and his blue-coats had ridden steadily that day, but they had not used up their horses in their haste. The two "trailers" with them avowed positively that the red-skins they were following had not turned to the right or left from the main pathway, and their commander was all the more positive that he was close upon an important duty. His keen-eyed scouts in advance suddenly sent back to him a shout of warning, and in a moment more he was leaning in the saddle for a look at the gory heads of the two dead Pawnees.

"The fighting began here," he said. "The settlers were driven and Jerry's gang followed, but how came these two to be scalped?"

"Friendly Indian," said one of the "trailer" scouts, himself a "good Pawnee."

"Indian's work," exclaimed the captain. "Forward!"

He was not excited, so far as any human eye could discern, but the same could hardly be said of the veterans behind him. All of these looked brighter and happier, and three were absolutely chuckling over the prospect of an actual "brush" after their long and weary hunt.

The whooping and yelling that became audible as the squad of cavalry drew nearer the edge of the woods did not induce the captain to hasten the

steady gallop which left his horses in good wind. Then came the crack of Red Beauty's rifle, and all it drew from the clear-headed leader was,—

"Work going on. We're in time;" but in a minute more the word was,—

"Sabres! Forward! Charge!"

They were in time as completely as was ever a flash of lightning out of a clear sky. If they had fallen from it they could not have come as a more complete and bewildering surprise. Not a Pawnee of Jerry McCord's gang had the least idea of waiting to be shot or sabred. One very prudent brave sprang from his pony and held up his empty hands, and, one after another, his fellows imitated him exactly. The blue-coats who had prematurely chuckled were forced to sheathe their sabres in utter disappointment while the captain ordered,—

"I'll attend to these, corporal. Take two men and ride over to that other house and see if all is safe there."

That was the right way to make it so, for all these events had occurred simultaneously, and the four Pawnees who had smitten Jerry McCord were too fiercely impatient to linger long before proceeding to further activities. They could approach the house very nearly, under cover of the stable, and as yet not a shot had been fired from the windows. Perhaps the inmates were white squaws only, or unarmed. They would see about it. The stable

might contain horses, and at all events it would give them uncommon pleasure to burn it down.

They were not to have any such treat as that. A dismounted Pawnee was at work with matches and some straw, and his mounted comrades waited by him. Perry was remarking to Jessie,—

"I wish you had let me shoot. I could have picked off one of them, if not two," when the quick thud of horse-hoofs behind the four would-be incendiaries suggested to them the arrival of more of their own gang. They did not so much as dream of white riders until the corporal shouted,—

"Now, boys!" He had been one of the men who chuckled, and he had understood like a flash the meaning of the other flash leaping up among the straw.

It was not so much a charge of three men upon four as a rush of armed civilization upon astounded and paralyzed barbarism. The shout of onset was answered by yells of dismay. The savage on foot threw himself flat upon the ground. Two others wheeled to run, and the one grim brave who turned instinctively to face the corporal raised his tardy rifle only to have it struck from his hands. His sidelong dodge behind his horse was begun with Indian quickness, but the return stroke of the sabre was venomously rapid. Cloven almost to the eyes, the savage fell to the earth, and the slayer

of Jerry McCord could hardly be said to have outlived him.

The corporal and the two men with him had heard the captain's orders to spare all who surrendered, or there would have been no prisoners taken, thanks to the general reputation of that band of outcasts. As it was, there were three disarmed Pawnees, in half a minute more, standing still to have their hands tied with rope furnished by Perry Munro.

He had rushed out of the house to take his share in the supposed fight the moment he saw a blue uniform, but all was over before he had a chance for a shot. He had not even noticed one interesting fact until the corporal and his comrades swung their hats and cheered, suddenly. Well they might, for there was Jessie Munro, revolver in hand, only a few paces behind her brother, and the corporal's excited inquiry,—

"Now, boys, I say, isn't she just a stunner?" did but faintly indicate the picture of female anger and beauty she presented.

"Are there troops at the other house?" asked Perry. "Is it safe?"

"All secure, I reckon," said the corporal. "We got in before any harm was done, I should say. Captain Ingalls and his men are there."

"Jessie," said Perry, "get your horse, quick. We must go at once. They don't know but what

we're killed. Corporal, you will find Jerry McCord's body out yonder."

"You don't say! That'll be a great relief to the captain. How was it?"

Brief but ample was the hurried explanation, but Jessie was in the saddle by the time the story was finished, and her brother had his foot in the stirrup.

"Mister," said the corporal, "you just report all that to Captain Ingalls and tell him we're waiting orders."

"I will," said Perry, as he turned to gallop after Jessie, leaving the corporal to reply to one of his men:

"Beauty? Did you say she was a beauty? I'd ride a thousand miles to see that gal come out of a house with her blood riz and a cocked pistol ready to shoot."

"So would I; and her brother's a good feller, too; but how came Jerry's own buzzards to light onto him?"

Nobody could answer that puzzle, and all they could do was to mount guard until the captain should be heard from. His despatch of the squad to care for the Munro house had been made with military promptness, while yet the inmates of Chumley's were but just aware of his arrival. A sudden whoop from the lips of Red Beauty had been followed by,—

"Blue-coat come! Ugh! All right now. Tell Chumley, cavalry!"

Chumley heard, but he lay silent and motionless, as if even life had departed from him, but Mrs. Munro sprang forward, exclaiming,—

"Open the door! They must go and save my children."

Red Beauty seemed willing enough to have the door thrown open, but exposed no part of his own person beyond it.

"Old Potawatamy no fool," he said to Mr. Munro. "Pawnee not know he here. Keep still awhile."

He was providing against future possibilities of meeting some of those surrendering Pawnees at a time or place less favorable.

Captain Ingalls saw the door open and out of it pour a procession, headed by Mrs. Munro, which quickly called upon him for the exercise of some firmness. His hat was off in a moment, as he rode forward to make inquiries.

"Is anybody hurt? Where is Mr. Chumley?" he asked, with a sweeping bow to the ladies.

"My children, sir! My son! My daughter! They went to the other house."

"I have sent men there. I shall know all very soon."

"I must go and see for myself!"

Mr. Munro had but glanced at the scene beyond

the fence and had hurried away after a horse, but the captain calmly responded,—

"I think not, madame. I cannot permit any one to venture out till I am sure the prairie is safe. As soon as these villains are tied up you can have a guard."

"I must go at once. I cannot wait."

"It will be but a few minutes." So it appeared from the will with which his men were doing that work of disarming and tying, but after a glance at them he again asked,—

"How is Mr. Chumley? Was he absent?"

"No, captain," said Gustav. "He was shot through the body. Out in the forest."

"Where the two Pawnees are lying. I met him here, four years ago. I remember your wife and daughter. You were the wounded man then."

"Father," almost whispered Erica, "I knew him."

He did not tell her what was in his eyes and mind concerning the fair girl he remembered and the young lady he saw now, but Mr. Munro came back from the rear of the house with his own horse and his wife's that had been tied there.

"You will have to wait a moment, sir," said the captain, "till I can spare a guard. I'll go over with you then. Can I see Mr. Chumley?"

No one answered him, but Mrs. Munro threw her arms around her husband's neck, sobbing out,—

"Joseph! Joseph! I dare not go! I dare not know what has happened!"

It was only a momentary break-down, for in an instant more she said to the steady-eyed captain of cavalry,—

"I am their mother, sir."

"And I am responsible for your safety, madame, and for that of all here. It cannot be long now."

Nevertheless the minutes did go by, and each seemed an age, until one of the "trailers" who had been scouting back and forth upon the prairie came in to report,—

"Two coming, sir. Man. Woman."

"Perry! Jessie!" gasped Mrs. Munro.

"I hope so, madame. My men are probably at your house."

"And they've not been in any danger at all. Perhaps they do not know the Pawnees are here."

That was a wild surmise, but there was comfort in it, and it helped her to wait with better patience an arrival so very near to come. Uncle John now made his appearance, and at last the captain obtained a sober answer concerning Chumley.

"See him? Certainly, but he is in a high fever,— delirious. This excitement is the worst thing that could have come."

Nevertheless, the captain's duty required actual seeing, and also that when Perry and Jessie came the former should answer official questions before

even being kissed by his mother. That was of somewhat less importance considering the half-frantic nature of the meeting between her and Jessie, not to speak of Erica and Mrs. Eagleson.

"So the corporal had to cut down one of them," said the captain. "That's good. And you saw Jerry McCord killed by his own Pawnees. That is very good indeed. Your account of the skirmish in the forest explains the scalp-taking. Where is Red Beauty now? I know him."

"He must be in the house."

"Keeping out of sight of these fellows. Cunning old fox. They've been led away now. I declare, he knows it. There he comes."

It was a fact. Not one movement outside of the house had escaped the watchfulness of the old Potawatamy, and here he was to say "How" and to tell the truth about this last operation of Jerry McCord's Pawnees. He did pretty well, except for omissions relating to the dead brave in the ravine, until the captain said to him,—

"So it was you who took the scalps. That accounts for them."

"Ugh! No. Good Indian. No take 'calp."

"Who, then?" asked the captain.

"Boy take one. Make present yellow-hair squaw. Old pill-man take one. Lose hair some day, perhaps. Then put on Pawnee hair."

"That will do," said the captain. "What a

witness you would make in a tight case! But I'd rather you'd swear on my side than against me."

It was a strange time for any laughing, and Mrs. Munro said so to the rest when she heard the military accompaniment of that reply, but Perry was now coming towards them, and she had no mind, just then, for any other fact.

Uncle John had returned to the house, and was in the front room when his niece slipped in.

"It's been an awful day for all of us, Jessie," said he. "I'm so glad the cavalry came in time. The captain seems an uncommonly fine character."

"How is Mr. Chumley?"

"He was doing well enough until he heard that you were in danger," said Uncle John, with entire simplicity. "That excited him fearfully. I don't know what to say about the consequences. Don't look in. He is talking incoherently about you and everything else."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SCENE IN A KITCHEN.

Mrs. Munro seemed to think that she had a debt of some sort to pay to Captain Ingalls. So did Gustav and Mrs. Eagleson, but it was many minutes before it occurred to either of them that it could be paid better in coffee and other refreshments for him and his men than in the most grateful kind of conversation. Those minutes had been remarkably well occupied and utilized, nevertheless.

It could not have been the unmistakable admiration in the captain's respectful eyes which caused Erica to beat a retreat into the house and through it to the kitchen. Perry had seen both, and yet he would have denied that any jealous uneasiness led him to follow closely upon the heels of that retreat. However, so it happened, there she was and there was he, with no better other company than Bob, who had followed Perry.

It was strange, perhaps, that so intensely timid an expression should come upon her face, now that all the Pawnees were tied up, or that a man of his ready courage should hesitate and look around the room, instead of right down into her face, for a moment, and should then stammer out,—

"He's a splendid fellow, Erica. I'm so sorry he was hit."

"Oh, Perry! Perry! I'm so glad!"

"Glad Chumley is hurt?"

"No! No! I love him. I hope he will get well soon. But you, Perry,—we were afraid they had killed you."

It was entirely the correct thing for her to say, but she had very nearly lost control of her manner of saying it. She must have been unaware that she was trembling, that her voice sounded preternaturally sweet, and that she looked more beautiful to Perry Munro than ever before.

His courage had not fully returned to him. For some reason he also was trembling. Nevertheless his eyes now looked into hers in such a manner that her hands went up as if to cover them, but only to be caught on their way by both his own.

"Erica," he whispered, "would you have been very sorry if they had killed me?"

"Oh, Perry!"

His courage must have entirely come again, for he drew her very near to him and she did not turn her face away nor strive to escape.

"Erica! Forever?"

"Perry."

There was half a minute of silence in that room, except for one anxiously inquiring whine from Bob, and then Perry once more whispered,—

"I meant to tell you some day, but I was not sure. I loved you so, Erica."

"I knew it all, Perry, when I heard about you, there in the woods, by Mr. Chumley. I was so sorry for him; but you,—oh, Perry!"

They were very young and they were wonderfully happy, but they were in the kitchen of a log farm-house on a very wicked earth, and that especial moment could not last.

Mrs. Munro's hospitality wits had come to her, and the captain had responded with hungry cordiality to what she said about refreshments for him and his men, after their long, hard ride. He said he would go over and inspect affairs at the other house, taking Mr. Munro with him, and be back by the time the proposed cooking could be done. His next movements declared by their rapidity that he meant to keep his word, and the two women started for the kitchen, Mrs. Eagleson remarking,—

"I'm so glad! Plenty of ham, bacon, smoked fish, half a deer hung up in the meat-house;" and Mrs. Munro's inquiring response was uttered as she entered the kitchen,—

"Half a deer?" and then she suddenly exclaimed, "My dear!"

"Yes, mother," said Perry, in a tone of triumph, but without changing the position of his right arm, "but this is a whole dear,—she is mine!"

"Oh, Erica!" that was what Mrs. Eagleson said

over Mrs. Munro's shoulder, and for some seconds afterwards the conversation was not easy to report. The two mothers, however, appeared to be entirely satisfied with the conduct of their children. All the rude kitchen around them seemed to expand into something unseen and wonderful, and did not contract to its usual size until Mrs. Eagleson exclaimed,—

"The captain! The soldiers! The fire is dead out!"

It was at about the same time that the corporal asked of Red Beauty, out in front of the house,—

"I say, do you know if either of those young women wants to get married? Because, if they do——"

"Ugh! Blue-coat fool. Not know. Both squaw belong to Red Beauty. Soldier come time to drive away Pawnee. Too late get squaw."

"Look here," responded the grinning corporal, "if you'd have your mouth sewed up for an inch on each side, and get the bridge of your nose taken down, and get yourself boiled and ironed, you'd be a good-looking old Indian."

"Better look than soldier now. Ugh! Soldier got face like chipmunk. Run away from man own him."

There was little profit to be had in an exchange of compliments with the old Potawatamy, but the members of that squad of cavalry who had not seen

Jessie or Erica were simply skeptics of what their comrades told them. They should have seen them when they met, just after Mrs. Eagleson set herself at work around the cook-stove. Mrs. Munro had walked into the front room ahead of Perry and Erica. She had found Jessie staring out of the window, like a girl in a dream, and had whispered something in her ear not audible to others.

"Erica? Perry?" exclaimed Jessie. "I'm so glad;" but the rest of her expression of it required no words and was very eloquent.

There was much cooking done at Chumley's house during the remainder of that day. The captain and his men attended to all that remained of their duties relating to the Pawnees, dead or alive, and when Jessie Munro and her mother went home they found no traces remaining of the terrible occurrences in or near it.

The parrot gave them a noisy welcome, and then for the first time Jessie was aware that she had actually heard and now remembered his vociferous remarks during the visit of Jerry McCord.

"He called him all the hard names he knew," she said to her mother.

"Potawatamy—devil—Pawnee," said Poll, with needless emphasis.

"I wonder where they buried him?" said Mrs. Munro. "He was a man who might have had a better end."

"It's over in the woods somewhere."

He would need no tombstone, that was certain, and if one had been put up, no man in that region could have told what name to chisel upon it.

Two weary families lay down to rest that night —to sleep or not to sleep, as the case might be— in well-guarded security. Uncle John declared that he had taken a good nap and that he alone must watch by Chumley's bedside, and the rest assented without a suspicion that his reasons were other than strictly surgical in their "character."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOW THE STORY ENDED.

THE day following a great excitement is apt to be one of noticeable quietness.

Even the captain and his men got quietly away with their captives, but not until after the former had visited both homesteads, as he said, to "pay his respects to the ladies," but really for one more look at Jessie and Erica, that he might settle a sad dispute in his own mind as to their comparative claims to perfection. He rode away more in doubt than ever.

Perry Munro awoke and came out for a sunrise look at the prairie and forest, with an idea that they had been transformed from a troubled range for Pawnees and horse-thieves into a sort of Eden. At all events he believed that he knew of one blue-eyed angel in it, and that he should see her very soon after breakfast.

Uncle John could hardly have been said to awake, for he had not been asleep. He had faithfully watched his "case" during the entire night, and both he and Mr. Chumley were in states of high fever. The latter had a manifest right to be so, for his delirium was a natural consequence of the work of Jerry McCord's bullet. His volunteer surgeon reported, with a very doleful shake of the head, that he feared the wound was taking on a bad character. He had yet another cause for the fever which was upon him, but he made no mention of it to any one until after Perry Munro came over to take his turn as watcher. Jessie came with him, and Perry's first errand did not take him to the sick-room. Hers did, and there was no reason why she should not be permitted to look at the man who had been shot on her account. She took a long, long look, for Uncle John had gone to find Perry and give him careful directions to do almost nothing whatever for Chumley. He was to let matters take their own course until Uncle John should wake up and come back with professional

skill and wisdom. For some minutes, therefore, Jessie was alone in that room and acting as temporary nurse and watcher. She drifted almost unintentionally across from the door to the window, and by that stood the writing-desk. Several envelopes, which may have contained letters, lay where Chumley had left them when suddenly called away the previous morning. Her eyes fell upon them very naturally and innocently. They were all addressed, in a plain, business-like hand, to "Richard Cholmondeley, Esq.," and Jessie knew of no such man. The name sounded English and aristocratic, and led her to note the fact that the stamps on the envelopes came from a British post-office. Then she felt that she was prying, and turned her eyes away. She was still thinking of that name when Uncle John sent to her a loud whisper,—

"Jessie, come here, I want to see you."

He turned away as she came out, and she was compelled to follow him through the front door and around into the shadow of the house before she could obtain any further explanation. Even then he began in a way that puzzled her, for he said,—

"I suppose you know more of Mr. Chumley's character than I do. I was aware that there was such a family, and that they spelled the name in the old way in spite of the pronunciation. If I

were you I would Americanize it, or your friends will never get it right. He and you have been more secret than you should have been, but I suppose your mother knows. I found this on his writing-desk, and I've let nobody see it. He would doubtless have taken better care of it if he had not been shot."

As he spoke he held out to his altogether confounded niece a miniature-case, wide open, and she took it in a hand that trembled visibly.

"Uncle John! What does this mean?"

"It's a right good likeness, only it isn't just your expression. I didn't know you had it."

"I never did have it. I don't know anything about it. It isn't me. Hide it, Uncle John. Go put it away. Don't let anybody see it."

Her crimson face had so much genuine distress in it that his very heart melted. It was a case that he did not at all understand, and he said so in several ways.

"Nevertheless," he added, "you have a right to your secret. He may die. I'm almost afraid he will. Then of course you wouldn't want anything said about it. My old notion was that he meant to marry Erica. I thought you thought so. It shows how a man may be mistaken. No, I won't touch that picture again. Seems to me your mother ought to know."

Jessie felt as if some of her wits were leaving

her, for Uncle John turned briskly away, sternly refusing to assume the custody of that love-token. It seemed to burn her fingers, and she wished to drop it in the grass. Still, as she looked at it again and again, she wondered when and where it could have been taken, and how Mr. Chumley came by it. The whole world was all a mystery, and it contained no Garden of Eden whatever.

Uncle John went into the house and into the bedroom opposite Chumley's, and in five minutes more he was soundly asleep, as he had a perfect right to be. Jessie did not dare to go in for some minutes. She wanted to see her mother, and at the same time she did not wish to see a living soul.

"Perry is in there. I'll tell him to put it back. It isn't mine."

It was more an impulse than a properly considered purpose, but almost before she clearly understood what she was doing she was at the door of Chumley's room, whispering to her brother,—

"Perry, take it and put it back in the writing-desk. It isn't mine. Uncle John brought it away by mistake."

Then she flitted away, and he did not see her again until the next morning, for he had something to say to Erica that evening, and was away from home a little late for so young a man. When he first took the miniature from his sister's hand, however, he had said to himself,—

"I declare! Is that so? Well! If they haven't kept still about it! Erica will be as glad as I am. It would be awful if he should die now. How she must feel! That's what made him so furious about Jerry McCord."

Erica, when he told her, was indeed delighted, and determined to see Jessie as soon as she could and tell her so.

Jessie had heard something more about it before that time came, for her mother was at Chumley's house when Uncle John awoke in the afternoon, and he did his duty well before he went in to relieve Perry.

"We must be very careful what we say before Jessie," he said. "She must be suffering terrible anxiety."

"Jessie? Why, John, what is there about her?"

Then came out all he knew, and as much more about the discovery of the miniature and of the correct way of spelling Richard Cholmondeley's long English name.

Mrs. Munro had a right to be vexed with her daughter for concealing so important a family matter, and she spoke to her husband about it, with a mind quite misty as to what her own duty might be.

"My dear," he said, "let her alone. I'm sure she has trouble enough just now. If he lives you will know all about it, and if he should die——"

"I do so hope he will not!"

"So do I. Let her alone."

She consented, but when she looked again and again upon her daughter's face, going and coming around the house, so full of trouble and perplexity, her motherly heart melted, and kept on melting more and more, until at last she put an arm around Jessie's neck and kissed her and said to her,—

"I do so hope you are not to lose him. Uncle John told me."

"Mother! Mother! Don't speak of it. I shall go insane! It is not my picture."

"It's his now, but Uncle John says the likeness is admirable."

"What shall I do? I do not know anything about it! It isn't mine!"

Mrs. Munro was mystified, and, at the end of half an hour's broken-up conversation, she was in what she herself called a "state of mind," for it was evident that Jessie was telling the truth.

"As soon as he is able to speak," she said, at last; and she did not go any further or say what she proposed to do then, but she promised Jessie to trouble her no more about it for the present. Mr. Munro and Uncle John rigidly confined themselves to looking wise and kindly.

Perry was out early the next morning, with a general disposition to sing. He and Bob saw Jessie go to milk the cows, and went to join her at once.

Her eyes were red and her cheeks pale, and Perry's heart smote him.

"I won't say a word, Jessie. I believe he is going to get well."

"Don't say any more, Perry."

"I'll go right away. Come, Bob."

Bob hunted around for a stick and went and laid it down by Jessie, in token of good will, and then she was rid of them both.

An hour or so later it was not possible to get rid of Erica. All that could be done was to accept her intensely sisterly expressions of sympathy and affection, and give up the miniature business in silent despair.

She had two weeks of it before her. A whole fortnight of mystery, during which every soul around her was painfully kind and forbearing. She was also made to understand that any and all explanations were out of order, and that the Garden of Eden around Chumley's Post was pretty well satisfied with the amount of romance it had on hand.

Mr. Richard Cholmondeley had nothing worse than a gunshot wound to endure, so far as anybody else knew, for just one half of Jessie's truly awful fortnight. Up to that time Uncle John had not felt that the character of the case justified him in speaking of anything but strictly surgical affairs. There came a morning, however, destitute of fever and accompanied by symptoms which implied great

discretion on the part of Jerry McCord's bullet. It had turned to the right to get out between the ribs before it had done irreparable mischief. It must also have shoved some things aside without breaking them. Uncle John felt that his patient could safely be trusted to bear a trifle of pleasant information.

"I have not mentioned it before, Mr. Chumley. When we brought you in from the woods we found your room in some disorder,—letters out and so forth."

"I left it in great haste."

"Remarkable old-fashioned way of spelling your name. I gathered them up and shoved them into the desk. My niece's picture——"

"Had I left that out? Heavens!"

"I asked her what to do with it."

"What? She saw it?"

"I gave it to her, and her brother tells me she made him put it back again. I have not spoken to her about it from that day to this."

A long, low groan from his patient answered him, and he had an alarmed feeling that he had exceeded his duty. Not for worlds would he have permitted another breath upon that subject, and he forbade it to all other watchers. For one whole week the mystery and romance had complete possession of that sick-room. Chumley had flushes of fever, every now and then, which Uncle John

could not understand, and he was almost afraid to give him quinine yet.

It was at the end of the week that Erica Eagleson came in to see her friend, for the first time, and she brought with her a fixed, settled, courageous purpose, which she had not even confided to Perry. It was good for any sick man to have such a face as hers shine down on him and say how glad were all that he was so rapidly recovering.

"Jessie will get well now, too. Oh, Mr. Chumley, why do you not send for her? Speak to her!"

"Erica? If she would come. Oh, if I could but say one word!"

"I must go right away, Mr. Chumley. I can't wait. Good-by. I will come again as soon as I can."

She was gone, a swiftly willing bearer of that message to Jessie Munro, and to enjoy the latter's astonished response:

"See me, Erica? He asked to see me?"

"He said, 'Oh, if she would come! If I could say one word.' He looked so—so earnest."

"I will go,—I must,—I must put an end to this! I cannot endure it!"

"I couldn't," said Erica, "if it was Perry instead of Mr. Chumley."

Jessie heard in silence, with burning cheeks. Leaving Erica to say what she might to her mother, she put on her hat and set out for Chumley's. She

seemed to be walking in a dim and troubled dream till she reached the house, and all in such another dream, though wide awake, had he been lying since Erica's flitting, and Perry Munro had been sitting by him, dreaming of Erica.

Perry saw his sister's face in the door-way, and the thought in his mind was,—

"Come at last? She should have been here long ago. I never saw her look so white, but she won't faint," and he was out of the room like a flash.

Mr. Chumley's face was pale enough, but his low, firm voice had no sign of weakness in it as he said,—

"It was not my fault, Miss Munro. Whether I live or die is of little consequence, but I must speak. You saw the miniature?"

"I did, and I have wondered——"

She paused, and he said to her,—

"It is a wonder to me, Miss Munro. It is the likeness of my brother's wife."

The quick blood mantled hotly to Jessie's temples, and she could not find in all her world one word to say.

"That is not all, Miss Munro. You will hear me, will you not? There was a boy once, and a beautiful woman made a fool of him. He supposed she had a soul and a heart, and she may have had. He declared, years ago, that she had neither,

for she cast him aside like an old glove, and married his elder brother. She also married a good property, for the boy had only an allowance of a hundred pounds a year. That is the way with entailed estates in England. The boy left home and country and came to America, and hated all women and many men, until there came to him a woman who taught him that he had simply been a fool. Shall I tell the rest?"

He had told it steadily and well so far, and she felt that she could not on any account cut him off, but there is in all of us an "imp of the perverse." He is especially busy on stormy days, and she perversely answered him:

"They are so happy, Perry and Erica," as if the fact of that happiness had anything whatever to do with his misery or the remaining history of it. It was but an old and withered idea, blown in the way unduly, and his only comment upon it was,—

"No one is more glad of that than I am. I had calculated upon it. But oh, Jessie Munro, if those fiends had harmed you I should have gone mad!"

A flashing vision of her encounter with Jerry McCord burnt through her mind and made her bend her head. Before she could recover any power to answer him, he went on:

"That was MY history, Miss Munro. It was years ago. You saw the miniature. The same face came to me again,—a woman with a heart and

with a soul. I did not know that at first, but it was the face my very life was waiting for."

He might have paused there, but it was now turned full upon him, and something in it suggestive of a rosy sunrise encouraged him to add,—

"It was your face,—whether I die or live,—your face—Miss Munro? Jessie? Am I delirious again, or has it really come?"

If he had been well and upon his feet, she probably would not have moved a step or uttered a word; but he lay there, wounded and helpless. If she should run away he could not follow her. Perhaps he might die and never hear the very answer she wanted to give him now. He was a magnet irresistible, and she went nearer, nearer, until the one arm he could use swept around her, and then she found voice to say,—

"Are you sure? Am I——"

"With all my soul I say again, I was a boy and a fool. You are my first love, Jessie."

"Oh, Richard! You must live! I have been so miserable."

She did not look so just then, and his face wore a sort of promise of speedy recovery. Perhaps she saw it, for the smile on her own grew brighter. The magnet was still at work, too, and since his lips could not rise to hers the smile had to come down and meet the "promise."

Perry Munro's duty as watcher did not at all de-

mand that he should look into that room very soon, but there is a great deal of stupidity among young men. His mind was troubled very much about the happiness of other people, being himself so very happy; but when he walked past the wide-open door and glanced through it as he did so, and saw his sister sitting by the bedside with Chumley's hand in her own, he remarked to himself,—

"Just as Erica said it would be. They've made up at once."

There had been no quarrel, but the "making up" was all that could be asked.

Uncle John was the only member of the Munro family who never could quite get a correct understanding of the story of that miniature, but none of them felt more pride over Chumley's rapid recovery.

When the next October days were brightest, one of them found the neighborhood of Chumley's Post in charge of some live-stock, presided over by a cat, a parrot, and five dogs. All the human inhabitants were twenty miles away, on a visit to the nearest "minister."

Mr. and Mrs. Perry Munro and Mr. and Mrs. Richard Cholmondeley remained away until late in November, but the rest returned the same day.

The most remarkable member of the wedding party had also been the most silent, and it was not until they were all on their way home that Mrs. Munro asked him,—

"Now, Red Beauty, what do you think of a pale-face wedding?"

"Think Indian heap fool. Give squaw father blanket, pony, gun. Heap good deal. White man keep gun, keep blanket, keep pony, give old preach man ten dollar for scold squaw. Ugh!"

His idea of the difference in the comparative cost of the two systems may have been limited, but his idea of his duty to remain as a sort of life-long retainer of "Chumley" was not, and he remained.

The story of Jerry McCord's death had long since been in the newspapers, and had been read by one set of bank officers with deep interest. The only human beings with a legal right to draw out the winnings of his dark career would never know to what bloody end it had led their lost son and brother.

Not long after the wedding, there was a breakfast-table gathering in one of the stately homes of England. The morning mail had been received, and the elderly lady at the head of the table opened first a letter and then a little packet, which had come all the way from America.

"Chelmsford!" she exclaimed. "Laura, love, Richard has married an American girl. He has sent her likeness. Oh, dear! Well. We must see what she is like."

Open came the packet, and again there was a sharp exclamation,—

"Laura! What does it mean? He has sent two of her. No, these are both your own pictures."

"He had one," murmured Laura, with a deep blush. "Chelmsford, dear, you know it was not my fault."

Her husband had stretched out a hand for the pictures, however, and now he answered her with a very hearty-sounding laugh.

"Dick always had good taste. That's yours, Laura. This is your sister-in-law. I declare! Found her in America, too. It is most remarkable."

"We must have them come and see us some day. What do you say, Laura?"

"I say so. Chelmsford, you and I must send them a wedding present."

"I think you owe him one," said he, "if only for the compliment he has paid you."

That was an error, too, but in due course of time the presents were received at Chumley's Post, and the visit to the English home was made.

THE END.